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VISIONARY NONCONFORMITY:  
MILTONIC RESONANCES AND THE POETICS OF RELIGIOUS DISSENT IN THE  
LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and  
Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Matthew Vickless

December 2015

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Matthew Vickless

2015

VISIONARY NONCONFORMITY:  
MILTONIC RESONANCES AND THE POETICS OF RELIGIOUS DISSENT IN THE  
LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By

Matthew Vickless

Approved November 3, 2015

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## ABSTRACT

### VISIONARY NONCONFORMITY: MILTONIC RESONANCES AND THE POETICS OF RELIGIOUS DISSENT IN THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By

Matthew Vickless

December 2015

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Daniel P. Watkins

In the wake of three decades of critical recovery work, which has restored poems by women and working-class poets to the British canon, critic Joseph Wittreich's groundbreaking critical model about visionary poetics now may be enhanced in order to reveal a more expansive and fluid Miltonic presence, particularly within much eighteenth-century visionary verse. This dissertation applies and at times refocuses Wittreich to achieve a clearer picture of how visionary poetry developed in Britain after Milton, accounting for key poetic visions by several women poets who wrote during the long eighteenth century. The visionary poetics of Jane Barker, Elizabeth Rowe, Mary Leapor, and Anna Barbauld are considered in an intertextual and cultural framework to suggest that the visionary mode, especially as practiced by these women poets, supplements political agency and elides barriers between the public and the private

spheres. The visionary poetics studied in this dissertation generated a hermeneutic of engagement that allowed otherwise disenfranchised women to politicize a private religious consciousness while at the same time underscoring the public nature of religion in the long eighteenth century.

## DEDICATION

To Melissa A. Wehler, Ph.D. and Cillian Benedict Wehler Vickless, with all my love.

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## Introduction

As a specialized area of scholarship confined largely to Milton studies, Romanticism studies, or a hybrid of both, critical statements on visionary poetics have addressed poetry that seeks to alter human consciousness on a grand scale. Such scholarship largely has been the result of questioning how subsequent poets were influenced by Milton's seminal visionary works, especially *Lycidas*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Samson Agonistes*, paying particular attention to the ways that poetry produced under Miltonic influence revises or corrects key parts of Milton's own designs for modifying perception and thereby altering consciousness. The essays collected in Joseph Anthony Wittreich Jr.'s seminal *Milton and the Line of Vision* (1975) established a successful critical model for studying visionary poetry. By focusing on a circumscribed "line of vision," comprised of male canonical poets from Edmund Spenser to Wallace Stevens, Wittreich's collection and subsequent studies of visionary poetics indebted to Wittreich have established Milton's primacy within the genre. In the wake of three decades of critical recovery work, which has restored poems by women and working-class poets to the British canon, Wittreich's groundbreaking model now may be enhanced in order to reveal a more expansive and fluid Miltonic presence, particularly within much eighteenth-century visionary verse.

This dissertation applies and at times refocuses Wittreich to achieve a clearer picture of how visionary poetry developed in Britain *after* Milton. To do so, it is necessary to account for key poetic visions by several women poets who wrote during the long eighteenth century, because the visionary mode, especially as practiced by several lesser-known women poets, supplements political agency and elides barriers between the public and the private spheres. The visionary poetics studied in this dissertation generated a hermeneutic of engagement that allowed otherwise disenfranchised women to politicize a private religious consciousness while at the

same time underscoring the public nature of religion in the long eighteenth century. Close reading of visionary poems by Jane Barker, Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Mary Leapor, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld (contextualized against a culminating survey of usage of the term *visionary* in late eighteenth-century public discourse) augments our view of the complex and multivalent visionary poetics being practiced in Britain during the eighteenth century—well before the appearance of Romantic visionary poetry in the 1790s, which comprised the subject of Wittreich’s early foundational scholarship.

Likewise, considerable study has been given to millenarianism and millennialism in the early modern period, as well as the resurgence of such movements in the revolutionary years of the later eighteenth century. Considerably less scholarship has been dedicated to prophecy as a discrete cultural and social discourse, an important signifier of millenarian and millennial behavior that was nevertheless governed by its own set of practices and engaged with its own traditions, specifically as a biblical hermeneutic. The scholar who has carried this line of inquiry through the cultural history of the eighteenth century is Susan Juster, whose cultural history serves to ground Wittreich’s literary-critical framework within wider cultural phenomena, political behaviors, and religious practices. I engage with Juster’s principle thesis, that “at once quintessentially modern and thoroughly steeped in Old Testament values, prophets offer an ideal vantage point from which to survey the political, cultural, and intellectual transformations of the ‘age of revolution’” (17), tightening its focus on key moments of literary production by women in the pre-revolutionary period (1688-1773).

It is important to distinguish the social practice Juster studies from the literary mode that constituted one manifestation of the practice. Both have been identified using the same term, prophecy. For the sake of clarity, the term visionary poetics will mostly refer to the latter, the

literary mode, while I try to reserve the term prophecy for referring to the broader practice. It is not always possible to preserve this distinction, in large part because the literary critic with whom I carry on a sustained conversation, Wittreich, uses the terms visionary poetics to identify how the literary mode prophecy is performed by poets like Milton and Blake.

If prophecy is a literary mode, then it is important to understand that mode as participating in a larger cultural discourse. Here, I follow Juster's definition: "In keeping with the permissive categorization of the time, I use the term 'prophecy' in its broadest possible meaning, to encompass all the shades of millennial interpretation from simple fortune-telling to formalized theories of Christ's return and the end of time. The common element is the conceit that biblical references and current events form a single providential history, a history for the most part of horrors unleashed and finally vanquished. prophets spoke largely in the tragic mode, though not without traces of the comic and ironic. Wherever they looked, they saw a bloody cycle of sin and retribution, endlessly repeated until God intervened to end time altogether" (4).

Examining prophecy as a literary mode practiced by writers who would not otherwise fit Juster's profile of the eighteenth-century prophet demonstrates how poetry operated to translate, clarify, complicate, challenge, revise, and ultimately *envision anew*. While Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld were not members of a radical fringe—despite the fact that each woman in her own way subscribed to and carried forward some thread of radical thinking—one aspect of Juster's characterization of late eighteenth-century prophecy does hint at why the prophetic mode, constructed using visionary poetics, appealed to women writers:

"Prophet" was a fairly elastic term in the late eighteenth century, a handy label to be applied to a variety of exegetical practices. At the most basic level, anyone could be a prophet, for the signs God provided were everywhere . . . Nature provided many clues,

but so too did less transparent fields of study such as astrology, mathematics, and history. At its most arcane, prophetic calculation involved knowledge of dead languages and obscure texts, skills available only to a select few. Even at its most sophisticated, however, true prophecy required a leap of faith—an exercise of vision, not intellect. The elusive element that transformed dry scholastic calculation into inspired prediction carried many prophets out of the realm of the natural world and into the supernatural one, where . . . they heard voices, had strange dreams, fell into trances, were guided by angels to celestial realms, and saw ghostly apparitions. (Juster 4)

Given the variety of social and political disadvantages and exclusions that rendered women into second-class citizens in eighteenth-century Britain, religious discourse in general and its more radical inscription prophecy both operated outside the orthodox political norms of the day. While medicine, the law, political office, the ministry, and a whole host of operations, professions, and behaviors remained off limits, prophecy, which had a long history of female practitioners dating back to the middle ages was—despite its radical connotations—a more socially acceptable activity for women offering some degree of literary and political agency.

We often assume that literature has a broad efficacy—that poetry, because it engages political, social, economic, theological, or other cultural matters, directly influences those matters. Yet without quantitative study, such qualitative analysis rarely rises to the level of sufficient academic credibility—with one important exception. Where evidence of intertextual engagement exists, then we can posit with a fair degree of certainty some direct impact, probably suggestive of wider influence on social or political behavior, such as attendance at services, voting, book subscriptions, periodical writing, and the like. Juster argues that prophecy both conserved and evolved, thereby exerting a remarkably hybrid influence and it became an

increasingly literary discourse: “After the Restoration, and especially with the establishment of partial legal and practical toleration for dissenting religions in the calmer atmosphere of Hanoverian England, the political edge of radical prophecy was blunted . . . On the other hand, the prophets of the 1790s and early 1800s had a greater visibility . . . For every person who joined a millennial sect or heard an inspired prophet in the 1640s and 1650s, hundreds of men and women read a millennial tract, followed the careers of itinerant prophets in the daily newspapers, or attended large open-air assemblies where obscure men and women warned of the dangers to come in the 1780s or 1790s . . . Prophecy was no longer just the art of applying biblical passages to contemporary events (though it remained that as well); it was now the business of selling both terror and reassurance to eager buyers” (Juster 7–8). The literary appropriation of prophecy shaped the development of the visionary mode and its unique poetics.

To make use of the visionary mode after 1667 meant to engage with Milton. Moreover, we need not reduce this engagement to a politicized (that is to say, a *gendered*) anxiety of influence paradigm. Wittreich’s own critical contestation with Harold Bloom uncovers—or rather clarifies—a more accurate theory of literary influence. The visionary mode as form of prophecy transcends numerous discourse boundaries (genre, etc.) and requires source material for the prophetic interlocution to occur. Because of its principally religious nature, the visionary mode understandably attracted a number of important women writers. I see Milton’s refinement of a visionary poetics with which later practitioners could engage as a more nuanced, less anxious, discourse.

Juster argues that prophecy followed a different trajectory from the broader alteration of politics undertaken in the eighteenth century, as analyzed by theorists, historians, and critics like Jürgen Habermas (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* [1962; trans. 1989]); J. C.

D. Clark (*English Society, 1660–1832* [2nd ed. 2000]); Roy Porter (*English Society in the Eighteenth Century* [rev. 1991]); E. P. Thompson, and others, who have demonstrated how politics became popularized. Instead, prophecy “splinter[ed] . . . into two streams, one respected and respectable, the other defiantly part of the ‘radical underworld’ of sectarians and pornographers . . . , [leaving] millenarians in a cultural and political wilderness” (15). Juster focuses on prophecy as a social discourse, shining critical light into “barely visible spaces (makeshift chapels, street corners, peddlers’ bags, print shops, market stalls, the back rooms of inns and taverns, prisons, insane asylums) where faith and reason met, not to vanquish one another but to jostle energetically for the soul of the believer,” which she identifies as “the elusive admixture of primitive occult desires and modern intellectual conceits that is a more accurate description of the phenomenon we simplistically call ‘the Enlightenment’” (16). In other words, prophecy was a discourse for engagement by otherwise disenfranchised or under-engaged citizens, especially women.

Not all prophecy was the same, and it would be inaccurate to speak of the visionary tradition as a monolithic discourse. Whereas Juster studies what we might usefully call pure prophecy, a religious behavior, I focus on the literary modality that borrows from, and at times purports to be yet is often less radical than, pure prophecy.

One way of distinguishing prophecy and the visionary mode is to consider one common manifestation of the prophetic orientation: the depiction of the afterlife. While pure prophecy has long incorporated such visions, particularly in the Hebrew apocalyptic literature, Milton’s *Paradise Lost* established a new model. Coleridge’s anecdote about Robinson Crusoe exemplifies the point: Crusoe represents Satan as scriptural, yet as Coleridge points out, the

Satan Crusoe describes does not appear in the bible but rather is Milton's invention (see Norton, 175n2).

There is an antinomian aspect to this as well. That prophecy in general, and apocalyptic vision more specifically, trend towards the antinomian has driven much criticism about William Blake, such as Martin Priestman's claim that "In suggesting that the Bible is not the final revelation, unless reinterpreted in completely new ways, antinomianism radically displaces its authority while at the same time focusing minute attention on to it as a source of allegory and metaphor" (qtd. in Juster 83).

Such scrutiny suggests that biblical studies as well as of the history of the bible in English have proved remarkably efficacious to the analysis of eighteenth-century visionary poetry. In part, this efficacy has emerged from growing appreciation for and ongoing refinement of interdisciplinary scholarship related the long eighteenth-century: "scholars across the early modern era have realized the benefits of inter-disciplinarity. For an age when literature was heavily engaged in politics, and for an age obsessed with the troubled issues of representing reality, it is essential that historians, art historians, and literary scholars talk to each other. This conversation has been particularly fruitful for decades in which such canonical writers as Milton, Marvell, Rochester, Bunyan and Dryden intervened actively in the controversies of the day, and when opinion was as likely to be shaped by poetry or satirical print as by prose oratory" (Claydon and Corns 1–2). For example, definitions derived from biblical studies, where apocalypse has a rather precise meaning, can illuminate eighteenth century visionary texts: apocalyptic writing advances "visions of a world of total corruption demanding radical change that cannot but be catastrophic, a sense of being both communally and individually on the razor's edge, and an exigent sense of a demand for new practices and forms of life" (O'Regan 10). This

definition aligns with the sense the word *apocalypse* commonly evokes: the end of the world in divine judgment, which has traditionally been used as a motivator for all sorts of social and religious practices. Yet apocalypse is a political construct as well. In many ways, the women in this project demonstrate that prophecy rendered through poetry can be both political and spiritual: “In times of crisis, when many people may feel so moved, [apocalypse] may be seen as taking place on a political as well as a purely mental or spiritual level” (Priestman 83).

The term apocalypse, etymologically related to hidden knowledge and revelation, can be applied to any depictions of life after death—not just to the end of the world: “nowhere are myth and the cosmological hierarchy more evident than in apocalyptic texts, which provide us with an unparalleled vision of divine action in history and thus divine figuration” (O’Regan 14). If there is a vaguely antinomian aspect to apocalyptic writings in general—and to eighteenth century prophetic poetry in particular—then we should recall that antinomianism was a significant cultural influence throughout the eighteenth century, one that transcended doctrinal or sectarian boundaries. For instance, the millenarian aspects of late eighteenth-century rational dissent, especially the apocalyptic interpretation of the French Revolution, intersected with a broader Antinomian tradition that manifested alternatively in various enthusiastic practices:

Antinomianism refers to “a blanket term for a set of beliefs involving the supersession of the authority of both the Old and New Testaments by the immediate inspiration of some or all believers . . . such beliefs had roots in the upswelling of independent religious groups in the seventeenth century, and were of seen as forms of ‘Enthusiasm’ appealing particularly to the radical working classes. There were, however, overlaps with the more middle-class ‘Rational Dissent’, particularly in the millenarianism which greeted the French Revolution as a fulfillment of prophecies of the overthrown of Babylon” (Priestman 8–9). While it would perhaps be



stretching things a bit to suggest that Rowe's *Devout Soliloquies*, for instance, which were the culminating examples of a wider project of creative biblical paraphrase, constituted an enthusiastic antinomianism, there is something extra-scriptural, and thus prophetic, about the apocalyptic Christianity Rowe's poems articulate. Likewise, Barker's medical imagery or Leapor's pastoral revisions, as well as Barbauld's own rational dissenting apocalypticism, push beyond the texts and traditions they engage—iconoclastic, at least, if not quite antinomian.

To that end, the integration of literary criticism treating the Miltonic visionary tradition with the history of the bible in English opens up a rich explicative context for the prophetic verse of Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld. Scholars and critics already have written the history of Milton in the long eighteenth century, or so it seems. In the mid-1970s, Wittreich helped initiate a major re-conceptualization of the Miltonic tradition as primarily visionary in nature. Partly a theoretical response to Harold Bloom's controversial "anxiety of influence" paradigm and partly a critical explication of Milton's influence on the Romantics, Wittreich's line of vision passed quickly and quietly through the eighteenth century, bowing to the pioneering scholarship of Raymond Dexter Havens and a seminal essay on the Miltonic visionary poetics of Pope by Kathleen Williams. Milton's eighteenth-century reception simply did not need to be revisited in the course of re-conceiving the Miltonic tradition: "the relationship between Milton and eighteenth-century poetry, already the subject of two books, has here been neglected," Wittreich tells us in his preface to *Milton and the Line of Vision* (xv). We today are not quite as far removed from Wittreich's seminal collection, published in 1975, as that collection was removed from Havens's *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry*, published in 1922; and admittedly, we are the beneficiaries of Dustin Griffin's *Regaining Paradise* (1986) and John T. Shawcross's *John Milton and Influence* (1991), monographs on eighteenth-century Miltonic reception that

appeared after Wittreich's collection. Still, the notion that we already know the story of Milton in the eighteenth century is remarkably persistent.

That story, moreover, has been remarkably stable, considering the seismographic upheavals in literary historiography that have occurred since Wittreich's collection appeared. A representative statement, such as that by J. Paul Hunter in the relevant volume of the *New Cambridge History of English Literature* (2005), exemplifies the point: "Milton remained throughout the period a powerful influence in spite of (and in part because of) the fact that his dominant blank-verse choices went against the grain of prevailing couplet practice. In every decade, there were significant imitations, often prominently labeled ones, of his style.... The stature of Milton (especially after his death in 1674) is, in fact, almost impossible to exaggerate" (171-72). Compare those remarks by Hunter to these by Haven, writing early in the twentieth century, of Milton's eighteenth-century reception: "Milton's shrine... was, like that of Thomas à Becket or of St. James of Compostella in earlier times, closely associated with the life and thought of the day and thronged with persons of all classes, each bearing his gift" (6). Moreover we still know the names of the eighteenth-century enthusiasts, both major and minor, even if we no longer study at any great length most of their Miltonic imitations and engagements: Dryden, Philips, and Pope (at first), then Thomson, Collins, Gray, the Wartons, and Young at mid-century, all progressing steadily and inevitably to Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge at the century's end. In other words, the eighteenth century proper was the necessary but comparatively uneventful bridge between the long eighteenth-century's more exciting bookends, the Restoration poets and the Romantics; it was the period in which Milton seeped into the DNA of the English language almost to the point of saturation, which in turn afforded Blake the chance to wring out the excess with such visionary zeal.

So the Miltonic visionary line passes through the eighteenth century on its way to Blake. Wittreich implies as much in the preface to *Milton and the Line of Vision*, but he is less reticent in the prefatory essay to *The Romantics on Milton*, the anthology of Romantic Milton-alia that Wittreich compiled and edited in 1970. “Though the intent of the Romantics was, perhaps, only to enhance their own art through a study of Milton’s, or to evolve a critical theory that Milton exemplified and they could emulate, their achievement was to gather the divergent strains of eighteenth-century criticism, to reorient literary values, to restore critical justice, and in doing this to write a vital chapter in the history of Milton criticism. We still live with its mental reverberations” (ix). In fairness to Wittreich, we must acknowledge as he does that the critical perspective the Romantics sought to correct was largely Samuel Johnson’s. Moreover, we need to historicize Wittreich’s own scholarship and criticism, as the Romantic poets comprised a special object of study in the U. S. academy of the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps contributing unfairly if nobly to the notion that nothing particularly visionary happened in poetry of the Age of Johnson and that no significant strides toward social justice could be inspired by likes of John Dyer, Grainger, or Young.

If modern British vaticism primarily engages the bible, as Wittreich and others have convincingly demonstrated, then it makes sense to think about the critical explication of scripture that plays out in the corrective rewriting of precursor texts (*Paradise Lost* is the true north on this compass) as culturally determined participation in the development of the bible in English. Wittreich’s scholarship, exhaustive within the bounds of the project’s scope, namely Miltonic apocalypse, sidesteps a larger aspect of the early modern religious zeitgeist. Writing in the mid-1970s, Wittreich was responding to a critical history, particularly Bloom’s revision of T. S. Eliot, that was able largely to take Milton for granted—or at least did not need to theorize a defense of

taking on Milton as a fit subject for academic literary criticism. As such, scholarly context, even historicized and interdisciplinary, as Wittreich's indeed was, serves explication of the primary poetic text, namely Milton. Wittreich's explications are almost entirely implicit, embedded within the analysis of the poetics Wittreich both defines and historicizes. Yet the meaning of Milton's major poems remains the tacit subject. If the critical lens is pulled back, opening up a wider view, it becomes fairly clear that Milton's visionary poetics, and the works generated with that poetics, contextualize a larger subject, namely the bible in English. While it may be pushing the matter too far to claim Milton was offering an alternative English bible encoded within the major works (*Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*), it is fair to claim, as Michael Norton does, that Milton's unquestionable belief in divinely inspired scripture did not extend to the English translations of the bible. In this respect, Milton was representative of his age in his commitment only to the absolute sanctity of the Hebrew and Greek scripture—a commitment he shared, for instance, with John Donne—and not to any Latin or English translation, which at best constituted an academic rendering, or paraphrase, of the original. Without a stable English bible, translation could be, and indeed was, less literal/scholarly (such as the Tyndale or King James bibles) and more literary/interpretive. The latter category defines, in alternative terms, what Wittreich calls the prophetic mode. Milton is not revising the bible, a hubristic enterprise bordering on heresy, if not outright sacrilege—as even his most engaged Romantic interlocutors concede; rather, Milton is rendering the bible into better English, encoding it within the poetic structures and multi-genre discourses of the British prophetic mode.

By the time Barker and Rowe wrote the bulk of their prophetic verse, the standard historiographic views posit that the state of the English bible was changing—becoming more fixed, less fluid, and in some versions, especially the King James Bible, rivaling the authority of

the original Hebrew and Greek scripture. Yet if the King James Bible's literary and cultural authority was largely an eighteenth-century construction, as Norton credibly claims that it was, then the prophetic mode must have changed in relative proportion. A visionary poet could no longer hope to write a better English bible, but he (and here, in this instance, I use the gendered pronoun intentionally) could hope to write a better poem than Milton. As a result, Milton, not the bible, becomes, at least in the Eliot-Bloom paradigm, the subject of prophetic engagement driven by Freudian anxiety or the sacrifice of individual talent at the altar of tradition. If Wittreich's intervention into this critical history sanded off some of the edges, it did not fundamentally change the basic subject, even if it more accurately historicized Milton's operative poetics and more fully defined the theological contexts with which Milton was engaged by and in turn reengaged.

My readings of the interventions Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld make into the Miltonic visionary tradition challenge one of the core assumptions behind the historiography of the bible in English: if the eighteenth century marked the moment when the English bible, especially the King James Bible, supplanted the Hebrew/Greek Bible as *scripture* (and here I follow the distinction Norton draws between the divinely inspired word, signified by the article-less term *scripture*, and specific translations of the word, signified hereafter by the plural term *bibles*), use of the Miltonic prophetic mode by Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld demonstrate that the English bible was less fixed, more fluid and unstable, than has been generally recognized. Partly, this is owing to the fact that religious writing by women—and women's religious poetry in particular—has not been included in the major histories of the bible in English. At the very least, the multivalent interlocutions carried out with Milton, respectively, by Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld, mark revelation as still ongoing. In other words, the

women in this study, at least in their prophetic verse, engaged in primary biblical translation, in the manifestation of divine inspiration as, or in the prophetic reading of scripture by means of, vatic poetry, which now, for better or worse, had to equally account for—even to challenge or correct—Milton’s own erroneous translation. Once we accept the premise that the prophetic mode encompasses as wide variety of genres and poetics, not simply the long visionary epics like *The Faerie Queene* or *Paradise Lost*, but instead, like its near cousin the pastoral mode is capable of being practiced in a wide spectrum of lyric forms, then the poetry of Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld, variously representative of the cultural instability of the long eighteenth century, shows that the bible in English was far from fixed, even if the broader culture and its dominant institutions failed to be persuaded by or even take adequate account for the contributions of the vatic poets, especially women *vates*, to the ongoing development of the bible in English.

Studying women poets in isolation from larger cultural and social contexts, however necessary for the purposes of recovery, tends to result in distorted views of the period. Religious subject matter exacerbates this issue: Sarah Prescott contends that “For modern readers . . . the tradition of Christian poetry can seem alien and uninteresting. As a result, . . . Rowe’s poetic expressions of her religious belief have often served to enforce her pious image which, by the same token, has made her a less than attractive figure to feminist literary history in its early stages” (“Elizabeth” 75).

This view is especially true when we consider religious poetry more broadly, and prophecy more specifically. Religious history and literary criticism, except in highly specialized fields of study such as early modern British literary studies (Claydon and Corns 2), have largely parted ways, and while there is growing acknowledgement of the importance of religion to

understanding British literary history of the long eighteenth century—or rather, of understanding more precisely the ways that literary history shaped and was shaped by the larger social and cultural history in which it participated—we have a ways still to go. Perhaps the ongoing difficulties of considering religion with critical detachment still guide academic discourse in ways we need to confront.

The women in this study loosely share an identity as Christian in the most general sense of the word, but for all intents and purposes they each worshipped a different god—or more precisely worshiped the same god in different ways, and their prophetic poetry reflects those differences. From Priestman's analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's thinking about religion, we can derive a principle that links the prophetic stances of the poets in this study as well: a tendency to equate "God with reason and fulfillment of potential" (30), which as Priestman's looking to Wollstonecraft underscores, is uniquely gendered in the long eighteenth century, during which time religion was an arena for sexual politics as well.

If that is true for religion in general, then it is doubly true for considerations of prophecy and apocalypse, concepts deeply embedded in the kinds of experiences that make academic study difficult: "While exceptions may be made for particular brands of political theology, in general the ascription of apocalyptic to Christian theological production in the modern and contemporary world is likely to be an embarrassment for an institution anxious about its disciplinary credentials and concerned about its credibility and standing in the modern world. Regarded as a phenomenon irredeemably past, and this anachronistic, when it does make its appearance, apocalyptic seems to be the prerogative of the fringe whose vitriolic condemnation of the present structure of the world is matched only by the hysteria announcing a new world order in which the protagonists are as eloquent as they are vague about the content of the new" (O'Regan 9).

Yet paradoxically this reality underscores the need to reinvigorate academic study of this material. One scholar of biblical apocalypse reminds us that “Apocalyptic texts, especially ancient apocalyptic texts, are curiosities, certainly engaging, maybe even in some respects moving, but their ways of seeing are impossible to us now, and their prescriptions of practices and forms of life appear to us ludicrous when not outrightly morally reprehensible” (O’Regan 11). This is true as well of eighteenth century visionary texts, even if their religious aspects are less strange. Unless we can reconstruct this way of seeing, then we will never have an accurate view of the literature of this period—of its contexts, its rhetorical purposes, and its methods of construction. As Backscheider reminds us, “It is possible that these religious poems, and similar ones by men, are of major significance to the history of poetry in English. The excitement that poets of the period felt about the expansion of kinds of religious poetry may never be recoverable, but recalling Watt’s title *The Adventurous Muse* reminds us that the greatest poets of the age found it a place for rich experimentation” (173).

The critical irrelevance of the apocalyptic is an issue biblical scholars still wrestle with: “not only is Revelation one influence among other influences coming from the entire history of epic and romance, but the very fact that apocalyptic is delegated to the imagination confirms rather than falsifies the view that contemporary theology seems to have built a *cordon sanitaire* around itself to repel apocalyptic infection” (O’Regan 15). While O’Regan is speaking here of Tolkien and Lewis, it is certainly relevant to the context of eighteenth-century prophetic poetry by women.

I am conscious—perhaps to a fault—of the degree to which this project participates in what Donna Landry called “the traffic in women poets”: “If our work helps to displace previous assumptions about some seamless, suffocating envelope of domestic ideology, or about the



overwhelming social importance of ‘the domestic woman’ in eighteenth-century social, sexual, and economic relations, we will have contributed to the making of more nuanced histories, but we will not have stepped entirely outside the circuits of commodification” (“Traffic” 191). The benefits of studying women poets in isolation, a critical project advanced in the 1990s that had been made absolutely necessary by decades of historiographical sexism, seems now a bit contrived. Still, gender is a crucial factor, which cannot be ignored, which signifies a political reality that is both contemporaneous and current.

To reiterate, then, this dissertation focuses on the kinds of influence exerted by religious nonconformity (including, in the case of Barker, Roman Catholicism) on the political and social visions of the poets under consideration. Such an emphasis recalibrates ongoing analysis of key social differences and political antipathies among the various dissenting faiths with which these poets were associated. A fuller understanding of such difference and antipathy as it is manifested in visionary poetry of the period augments broader discussions of the rich diversity within British nonconformity during the long eighteenth century. This context has been insufficiently explored in relation to visionary poetics in part because existing criticism, influenced by Wittreich’s, has tended to focus on seventeenth-century Puritanism, especially its millenarian use of the Apocalypse of St. John, as a principal influence on Miltonic prophecy. The visionaries I study subscribe to fiercely anti-Puritanical doctrines, a remarkable commonality among otherwise dissimilar nonconformists. This shared anti-Puritanism renders as something of a paradox Milton’s continued presence (through allusions, echoes, analogues, and revisions, not all of which are condemnatory) in dissenting visionary poetry.

Existing scholarship in the field of British visionary poetics, with few exceptions, falls into three camps: studies of Milton as a prophetic poet (including examinations of Miltonic

influence on later, especially Romantic, poets), studies of British Romanticism as the exertion of unique imaginative power, and materialist studies of the relationship between visionary poetry and politics in the Romantic period. Almost no attention has been paid to visionary poetry of the eighteenth century, and, when the poets here considered have received critical attention, their visionary orientations have gone unremarked. This dissertation advances our understanding of the British visionary tradition by expanding it to include important visions by women poets, written between the publication of Barker's *Poetical Recreations* (1688) and the first edition of Barbauld's *Poems* (1773). It also devotes attention to a number of insufficiently studied poets of the long eighteenth century. My principal contribution to the definition of British visionary poetics developed according to the Wittreich model is to sharpen its focus onto the issue of movement. The visionary poet tries to alter human perception on a grand scale by reorienting the reader. That reorientation occurs when the reader is moved—emotionally, physiologically, or spiritually—to act upon new insights gained through the visionary poem. The poets I study in this dissertation may be considered visionaries in large part because they desire to influence movement, a key characteristic of British visionary poetics that scholars have insufficiently foregrounded. Accordingly, I examine how intersections of gender, class, but especially religious affiliation contribute to the visionary orientations and sensibilities developed by these poets in order to impart special insights and in turn influence movement of one kind or another.

The capacity to move human beings was, and still is, a kind of sacred power—even if the sanctity of that power is often defined via analogy. There is a long history of associating poets with gods in one way or another, whether as mouthpieces for divine wisdom or as first causes in and of themselves, bringing worlds into being through language and, to paraphrase Percy Shelley, legislating them accordingly. And so we still are authorized to read the poetry of self-

proclaimed visionaries with some notion of the sacred before us and to articulate our readings using a vocabulary of faith, which allows us to more accurately discuss the correspondences that exist among disparate kinds of visionary utterances: among prophecies of divine will, vatic descriptions of eternity, and secular imaginings of a more just society. Unless we accept the notion that visionary poetry, in its expressed desire to cause motion, tries to achieve something extraordinary, something profoundly unavailable to other kinds of literary expression (even other kinds of poetry), the poetics of vision loses much of its remarkableness. Yet to recognize the uniqueness of visionary poetics is not to claim that the critical discourse available for studying it, drawn largely from Jewish and Christian prophecy, should be exempted from rigorous theoretical scrutiny. This dissertation questions the existing scholarly discourse about visionary poetics, drawing upon it and revising it as needed, in order to advance a more thorough reading of how several non-Anglican women poets of the long eighteenth century used and at times reformed a British vatic tradition that dates back to the Middle Ages. The poets this project addresses, I contend, adopt and adapt various poetic manifestations of Judeo-Christian prophetic techniques in order to move contemporary audiences to take unpopular or even dangerous stances on key religious and political issues of the day.

Methodologically, I draw upon my own close readings of the poems under consideration, with analyses informed by existing scholarship on British visionary poetics and, when available, on the poets under consideration (Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld). In a way, the designation *visionary* is itself an expression of marginality, of literary utterance occurring outside mainstream or orthodox culture. In order to more precisely define that term, particularly as it applies to certain women visionaries of the long eighteenth century, I situate within ongoing and, in some cases, long-standing conversations about vatic poetry and political/religious power

structures in Britain my own close reading of key visionary texts by women—informed by, but not always primarily concerned with, except where it shapes their visionary orientation, the poets' gender.

Finally, a word must be said about the texts I will be consulting. Textual authority remains an issue in eighteenth-century studies, especially germane to the study of visionary women poets of the period. Recent anthologies, beginning with Roger Lonsdale's *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (1990), can be limited in their usefulness, tending to exclude political verse in favor of the domestic or the personal and thereby skewing our picture of many women poets of the period (Barash 1). As such, my project, by attending to contemporary and subsequent reception history of the poems under consideration, contributes to ongoing efforts toward creating more complete portraits of their authors. In particular, I consider relevant details of the poems' original publication, contemporary reviews (references to the texts appearing in periodicals, personal correspondence, and the like), and, when possible, allusions made by later visionary poets to the works being considered. These contexts, when accurately reconstructed, help to clarify the visionary designs of the poets as well as to provide reasonable grounds by which we may adjudicate the success of their visionary aims.

As such, I study visionary poetry by Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld as closely as possible in the form and manner in which the poems originally appeared. Electronic digitization—by the Google Books Project, Early English Books Online (EEBO), and the Eighteenth-Century Collection Online (ECCO)—has made readily available much of the verse and contextual materials that I study. Admittedly, digital versions of texts that have not undergone rigorous bibliographic research, as is the case with some of the poetry I consider, remain problematic objects of study. Where supplemental scholarly editions are not available, I

have availed myself, whenever possible, of facsimile editions prepared by scholars, as in the case of Elizabeth Singer's *Poems On Several Occasions. Written By Philomela* (1696), which has been included in *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works* series with an introduction by Jennifer Richards. Again, such facsimiles only supplement digital versions of the original volumes.

As this project explores relationships between visionary poetics and religious nonconformity in British poetry, primarily by women, written during the long eighteenth century, five dissenting poets comprise its major focus: Milton, Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld. Four substantial chapters comprise the bulk of the project, concluding with a contextual epilogue surveying usage of the term *visionary* in late eighteenth-century public discourse suggestive of a prevalent cultural zeitgeist these women helped shape.

Before sketching out in greater detail the project's chapters, I should explain why Milton will not receive discrete treatment. Almost all critical studies of visionary poetics, following the groundbreaking work of Wittreich, place Milton in a central position, a major source of direct influence and a key point on "the line of vision." Arguments advocating that pervasive centrality need to be acknowledged. However, my project conceives of Milton less strictly. A chapter-length treatment of Milton and visionary poetics would distort my notion that Miltonic allusions, echoes, analogues, or revisions in eighteenth-century visionary verse reveal a more fluid or aerosolized presence. In other words, the visionary poets I study are responding to or reemploying Milton and Miltonic poetics even when, as is frequently the case throughout the eighteenth century, they are not directly engaging with poems or prose by Milton. If that prevailing influence can be better mapped, then we can clarify Milton's actual place in eighteenth-century British literary history. Therefore, as needed throughout the dissertation, I

advance my own analyses of polemical prose and visionary poems by Milton and to draw upon (and when necessary supplement) Milton scholarship.

Because this project assumes that visionary poetics *develop* during the eighteenth century, the discussion unfolds chronologically. The first chapter studies the Jacobite Catholic poet Barker. Her published verse, all of which appeared in *Poetical Recreations* (1688), reflects aspects of late seventeenth-century loyalist Catholicism. The Barker chapter investigates how Tory loyalism intersects with vehement anti-Catholic biases among Anglicans and nonconformist Williamites. At the same time, it explores ways in which British Catholics like Barker anticipate later protestant dissent, particularly with respect to issues of women's education, liberty of conscience, and other forms of social reform. The topical focus of the chapter is Barker's medical visions. I argue that Barker's medical verse participates in paradigms of visionary poetics largely established by Milton even as it critiques, and seeks to correct, what the Catholic Barker perceives of as errors stemming from Milton's radical Puritanism and anti-monarchical politics. I also will account for Barker's virtual disappearance from the eighteenth-century literary record by exploring how anti-Catholic rhetoric came to occupy a central place in the discourse of subsequent protestant dissenting poets.

A treatment of Barker's near contemporary, Elizabeth Singer Rowe, follows. Chapter two traces the ways that Rowe, an ardent Williamite who circulated among important Non-Jurors and Low-Church dissenters, undertook large-scale poetic visions based upon the Bible and biblical paraphrase. Whereas Milton, who had pioneered such enterprises, drew largely upon apocalyptic prophecy, Rowe anchors her visions in the Solomonic wisdom tradition. I explore why Rowe finds that tradition more amenable than the millenarian apocalypticism associated with Milton and radical Puritanism to her sense of women's rights, individual liberties, and social doctrines

based in piety. Singer Rowe's association with key figures in early eighteenth-century dissent, including Thomas Ken, Issac Watts, and Matthew Prior, help contextualize my analysis of her verse.

A third chapter advances the discussion into the eighteenth century proper. Its focus, Mary Leapor, introduces into the project the issue of class. Whereas Barker and Rowe maintained close ties to upper-class and aristocratic nonconformists, Leapor was a working-class poet. Study of her visionary poetry traces how religious dissent after the Whig ascendancy informed Leapor's pastorals and country-house verse, providing a means of studying intersections between Whiggish social philosophies and varieties of nonconformity not yet considered. With respect to Milton, Leapor's verse affords an opportunity to study the indirect nature of Milton's pervasive eighteenth-century presence. Although some knowledge of *Paradise Lost* is evident in Leapor's verse, Alexander Pope served as a more immediate influence. I investigate how Miltonic presences in Leapor's poetry, filtered through her readings of the Catholic Pope, comment on varieties of dissent unified after the staunchly anti-Catholic Hanoverian succession took root.

Arguably the most important British visionary poet not discussed by Wittreich is Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Although recent scholarship has begun the process of restoring her to the line of vision, her status as an early Romantic abides. My fourth chapter investigates the extent to which Barbauld's early work is the culmination of a century's worth of visionary poetics by nonconformist women. In particular, I argue that the visions of Barker, Rowe, and Leapor influenced, either directly or indirectly, Barbauld's poetical figurations of political reform. More specifically, I argue that Barbauld's strong dissenting principles, steeped in Presbyterian and Unitarian thought, form the basis of the eighteenth century's first large-scale revision of Milton

(predating William Blake's), tempering the militancy of Milton's prophecies. In the process, Barbauld overtly aligns herself with Rowe, and thus she defines a tradition of visionary poetics by nonconformist women. A substantive epilogue, surveying usage of the term *visionary* in late eighteenth-century public discourse, provides additional context against which to measure the contributes of Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld to the British visionary mode.



## Chapter One: The Visionary Poetics of Katherine Barker's Medical Poetry

Jane Barker, loyalist Catholic exiled Jacobite, seems an odd place to commence a study of Miltonic visionary poetics and non-conformity in the long eighteenth century. Milton, the radical republican regicide, seems antithetical to Barker's fundamental ethos. Yet the two poets demonstrate the remarkable complexity of nonconformity in Britain at the start of the eighteenth-century proper. British Catholics like Barker anticipate later protestant dissent, particularly with respect to issues of women's education, liberty of conscience, and other forms of social reform. Some continuity links the conservative Barker with the progressives of the French Revolutionary period: "It was [Barker's] generation of women poets who . . . [advanced] a serious critique of normative models of marriage and women's lives and began to answer some of the most public and publicized attacks on woman's 'nature' and aspirations" (Backscheider 69). Barker's published verse, all of which appeared in *Poetical Recreations* (1688), reflects aspects of late seventeenth-century loyalist Catholicism, a religion that after the Revolutionary events of the year in which Barker's volume was published became an entrenched version of British nonconformity.

Barker flamboyantly and reflexively self-identifies her own religious ideology in "To His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, on His birth day . . ."

Forgive me sir that on this happy day

On which all vertuous minds ought to be gay

I here appear in non-conformity

Presenting you with a sad Calvary (1–4)

As Wilson notes, nonconformity in the early modern period extending into the eighteenth century was a strict legal designation, meaning "member of other than the Church of England"

(292n). This definition benefits from additional context. One of the effects of the Clarendon Code was to clarify

the relationship between England's religious groupings into two opposed camps: those who conformed to the requirements and obligations of the Church of England and those nonconformists who did not. At a stroke, this eliminated the Interregnum's subtle gradations of radicalism and heterodoxy that spanned from Presbyterians comfortable within a national church through congregational independency to the extremer sectaries and to the Quakers. In the eyes of the law, all were subject to the same penalties and restrictions . . . To be hostile to the national church was to be hostile to the restored monarchy, and thus to provoke a sometimes savage persecution. (Claydon and Corns 3–4).

In the period immediately following the institution of the codes, anti-Catholicism ebbed considerably, yet the later years of Charles II's reign witnessed intense and systematic anti-Catholicism, which served to smooth over doctrinal differences among Protestants: "English Protestants appeared more united by their central principles than divided by their preferences in the style of worship and their models for church government" (Claydon and Corns 5). This ideological backdrop brings Barker's poems—specifically their Miltonic engagement—into sharper relief. I believe Barker is another example of how early modern Catholicism inspired intensely political outsider art, akin to something that emerges from Hallett's consideration of the English Carmelite convent in Antwerp, which advances an important thesis: "Catholic patriotic paradigms emerged from resistance to Protestant representation and . . . generated independent models" (13).

Moreover, Tory loyalism intersected with vehement anti-Catholic biases among Anglicans and nonconformist Williamites, which created strange ideological bedfellows. For example, Barker's engagement with the radical republican regicide Milton, I contend, is the result of this amalgamation of cultural pressures. Loyalty to a king whose father Milton at least rhetorically executed renders Barker's adoption of Miltonic orientations, if not poetics, worthy of consideration. Of course, given Milton's role in the civil wars, which cost the pro-Stuart Barker family considerably, Milton is understandably absent from the list of sources, influences, and contemporaries that one of Barker's modern editors, Carol Shiner Wilson, uses to situate Barker in the literary and cultural environment of her day (xxxii–xxxvi). However, the visionary poetics framework developed by Wittreich, reconsidered anew, exposes a creative and critical reworking of important Miltonic content in Barker's published poetry and helps clarify and flesh out a crucial point Shiner makes in her masterful introduction, where she discusses Barker's participation in a vatic tradition through choice of pseudonyms by identifying a

tradition of coterie writers adopting pseudo-classical literary names such as Orinda, Strephon, and Lucasia. Barker's chosen pseudonym recalls the female form of the Latin name 'Galaesus,' a son of Apollo, god of poetry. It is also the name of the Numidian princess briefly portrayed in *Exilius*. Both sources articulate Barker's bold sense of self, actual and desired, as an assertive woman who vigorously pursues the intellectual and the athletic lives, both male-dominated domains during her lifetime. The Numidian princess is a masculinized huntress of jungle beasts and a student of philosophy and law. The Greek figure was both poet and prophet. (xxxvii)

The name Galasia also closely corresponds with the name Galen, the Greek physician who exerted considerable influence on the development of English medicine in the early modern period. By considering more fully the implications of Shiner's statement, especially in terms of the frequent references to medicine found in Barker's verse, we discover Barker engaging in a significant rewriting of Milton.

Yet unlike other poets in this study, Barker's engagement with Milton does not neatly fit into the critical paradigm Wittreich maps out. While certain of Wittreich's explicative conclusions do help advance my analysis of individual poems by Milton and Barker, another overarching model of criticism is needed to establish the nature of their engagement. I believe that we can locate Barker within the cultural confusion attending late seventeenth-century loyalism, which Corns and Claydon describe as being comprised of "people unsure of what loyalty meant when the king's position could not be tied down; unsure who they were (insiders? outsiders?) as religiously controlled definitions of the national community altered; finding strange allies as ideological positions reconfigured; or simply at sea in a treacherous maelstrom of whirling cultural currents" (7). Barker's medical verse participates in a visionary poetics tradition capable of allying conflicting ideologies.

Issues of historiography, in the early modern period as much as now, can distort our view of authorial relationship and influence. For example, Claydon and Corns, noting the history of scholarly neglect of the post-1660 period, remind us that "if interest in Milton kept literary studies [of the Restoration period] alive, it was curious that this great author tended to be seen as a radical of the mid-century crisis, in ways which ignored the Restoration context of his late masterpieces, *Paradise Lost* (first edition: 1667), *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* (both 1671)" (1). With this reminder in mind, it is possible to think of Barker and Milton as

contemporary yet alternative contestants, rather than as progressive, contesting points on a line of influence—which is not to suggest that Barker does not contend with Milton, for she does so with confidence and rigor. However, Barker’s engagement with Milton is a contest fought by near contemporaries rather than by a strong historicizing reader (Rowe, as we will see in the next chapter, falls into this later category).

Moreover, the approximate contemporaneity of Barker and Milton positions them within the fecund unrest of the post-Restoration era—the world turned upside down turned upside down again. In this way, Barker and Milton are a window into a complex religio-political matrix, described effectively by Claydon and Corns: “a single, simple polarity (regime/radical opposition) was replaced with a series of less correlated fractures (Anglican/dissenting; court/critic; Catholic/Protestant). Compounded by the uncertain position of the court, the change meant statesmen now had to construct more diverse and transient alliances to achieve their goals, and had to make more dramatic shifts of tactics” (6) In other words, Barker’s Catholicism paradoxically aligns her with Milton’s Puritanical dissent, when viewed from the perspective of the High Anglican establishment, even as Barker’s Catholic loyalism conflicts with Milton’s regicidal Puritanism.

More specifically, neither Barker nor Milton properly fit into emerging social authority structures. As Claydon and Corns argue, Protestantism of this period needed some uniting belief. The search for such a thing caused further confusion because some people began to find the solution to the problem of diversity by embracing that diversity itself. For increasing number of thinkers, the soul of the Protestant faith became the free interpretation of scripture and a tolerant celebration of the variety this brought. This allowed collaboration against a rigid and persecuting Catholicism, but it began to question if any doctrinal, spiritual or

moral norms could be imposed, and thus in turn undermined authority in a wide range of spheres” (Claydon and Corns 7).

This relativity—this authority vacuum—suggests a supplemental framework for looking at Barker’s Milton, enriching the critical model established by Wittreich.

To this frame might be added yet another critical model for considering influence and unlike poets. A fairly recent essay by James Grantham Turner concerned with Milton and long eighteenth-century libertinism provides an alternative way of considering poetic influence (elsewhere Turner claims that “diametrical opposition is quite an intimate relation” [Turner, “Milton” 447]). Turner’s essay “as a thought experiment, reintroduces Rochester as a comparand to Milton . . . explor[ing] paradoxical correspondences between two writers normally considered diametrical opposites—the libertine earl and the pious Puritan—drawing partly on their own writings and partly on how they were constructed and memorialized by contemporaries” (99). If Milton and Rochester can be read in this way, why not Milton and Barker? Milton’s radical Puritanism is a critical commonplace, part of the conventional wisdom of early modern literary historiography. Yet Barker’s Stuart loyalism was analogously radical: “that she was a committed Jacobite is beyond dispute . . . It may seem a bit sensationalizing to call Barker a ‘Jacobite spy,’ but active Jacobite she manifestly was, and willing to assist those seeking to overthrow the British government of George I . . . [and] she continued to support the Stuart cause long after any real hopes of a restoration had passed” (King and Medoff 26). Barker’s political relevance is as strong as it is undeveloped: “That Barker—famously moral, decorous, and above all respectable—was attached to an insurrectionary politics certainly complicates the prevailing picture of her . . . born during the Interregnum and living well into the Age of Walpole, continued all her life to inhabit a mental universe shaped by the political and religious crises of

the seventeenth century” (King and Medoff 28)—given Milton’s role in those crises, a comparative reading through the visionary poetics framework of Wittreich further illuminates each writer and adds nuance to our understanding of visionary poetics in the long eighteenth century.

Another point to keep in mind when considering the utility of reading Milton through Barker is that Stuart loyalists were not universally hostile to Milton, which makes it even more likely that ideological disagreement, no matter how strong, did not always translate into conscious disregarding. For example, Turner’s speculative argument about Rochester’s knowledge of Milton makes note of several loyalist avenues, most notably Dryden, whose visit to Milton was well-known; additionally, Samuel Barrow, one of Charles II’s physicians, “wrote the Latin commendation for the 1674 *Paradise Lost*” (103). Moreover, Turner presents a convincing case against reading Milton as a political progressive, concluding that “Milton was so committed to his vision of a reformed aristocracy . . . that he blames the failure of the Commonwealth on its betrayal. Looking back from the vantage of 1670 he declares that political power should never have been shared with ignorant plebeians . . . [implying] that the revolution collapsed because it was not led by products of his own classics-based *Of Education*, which he pointedly reissued in 1673 as part of his new collected poems, placing it within his creative oeuvre” (107–8). Milton’s conservatism, Turner argues, serves to link, at least broadly, the republican Milton with the monarchial Rochester (107), which essentially serves as an avenue of critical commerce. The same might well be true of Barker, whose writings, especially her novels, advance a “conservative political agenda” (King and Medoff 17).

With this line of thought in mind, the Miltonic engagements in Barker’s poems, although highly critical, could very well be the results of an intensive and indeed systematic engagement

with the same cultural subjects that drove Milton to write—of a contemporaneous rather than of a historicizing rewriting. In the mid 1990s, feminist recovery criticism still tended, remarkably so, to de-politicize women writers (King and Medoff 28–29):

Barker is almost invariably placed in the so-called pious school of female novel-writing (with, among others, Penelope Aubin and Elizabeth Rowe) as part of the habitual separation of women into the opposing camps of ‘daughters of Behn’ (scandalous, outspoken, sexually explicit) and the ‘daughters of Orinda’ (moral, ladylike, modest—a good girl/bad girl split that, remarkably, remains largely unchallenged, even in feminist literary histories . . . in her politicized use of a variety of highly crafted authorial self-images she has much in common with Aphra Behn and Delariviere Manley . . . Barker chooses, however, not to eroticize her autobiographical personae, but to construct them as figures of the alienated Other, so shaped as to express the disaffection of whole range of people marginalized in hanoverian Britain—among them a tiny Roman Catholic minority, a more widespread community of Jacobite dissidents, and an assortment of odd women. (28–29)

This otherness, defined by its alienation and civic/religious powerlessness, qualifies the poetry of Barker, resonant with Miltonic overtones, for consideration through a critical framework with the “voice of one crying in the wilderness” at its heart, namely visionary poetics.

A further biographical point connects Milton and Barker—less credible yet somehow more telling. Barker’s near blindness in later life following surgery to repair cataracts (King and Medoff 23) presents another—if tentative—connection with Milton. By 1700, Milton’s blindness



was indeed a signifying feature of the Miltonic persona, and the connection is worth mentioning here, although I will rest no explicative conclusions upon it.

Still, Barker was more than capable of adopting a Miltonic posture. “To His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, on His birth day . . .” dramatizes the supplanting of pagan vatic poetics with Christian prophecy. The theological dimensions of that stance are, more specifically, Catholic, which lends the poem much of its energy. For example, Hallett finds in the birthday panegyric examples of a wider “exilic literature” that also includes the writings of English Catholic nuns in Europe (20). I contend that the occasion depicted in the poem affords Barker the chance to meditate prophetically on the Jacobean exile in France: the poet answers her own rhetorical question—“But why do I, thus Sibillize to you?” (18)—with biblical references culminating in a Genesis figuration of exile, of paradise lost: “That Adam left not his lov’d paradise, / With more regret than they this place of bliss” (48–49). This early prophetic stance—early in terms of Barker’s post-exilic manuscript career—marks a logical next step in a process mapped out in the penultimate poem (of Barker’s contributions) in *Poetical Recreations*, “A Farewell to POETRY, WITH A Long Digression on ANATOMY.”

The poem’s digressive opening is an extended meditation on the poet seemingly forgoing poetry to study medicine:

Farewell , my gentle Friend, kind Poetry ,  
For we no longer must Acquaintance be;  
Though sweet and charming to me as thou art,  
Yet I must dispossess thee of my Heart.  
On new Acquaintance now I must dispence  
What I receiv’d from thy bright influence.

Wise Aristotle and Hippocrates ,  
 Galen , and the most Wise Socrates ;  
 Æsculapius , whom first I should have nam'd,  
 And all Apollo's younger brood so fam'd,  
 Are they with whom I must Acquaintance make,  
 Who will, no doubt, receive me for the sake  
 Of Him, from whom they did expect to see  
 New Lights to search Nature's obscurity. (1–14)

This announcement can be read in highly gendered terms, of a woman setting aside leisurely distraction for the serious business of nursing a family member. Yet given the vatic orientation to which the poem ultimately builds, it is possible to invest this opening with Miltonic significance. If we consider the ambiguous multivalence of *kind* (1), then it is likely that Barker is engaging in some serious wordplay. The word, situated so close to the term Friend (1), evokes benevolent friendship—but it also signifies genre; rather than giving up silly poetry for a more culturally appropriate kind of female labor, nursing, instead Barker is announcing her decision to forego one mode of poetic expression (or kind) for another: the pastoral gives way to the prophetic, a move dramatized by the trajectory of the poem, which ends considering the visionary orientation: “O joys Eternal satiating Sence, / And yet the Sence the smallest part in gross” (139–40).

This reading of the poem emerges even more clearly when the opening lines, with their encoded consideration of genre, are put in conversation with Milton's *Lycidas*, the work Wittreich identifies as constituting Milton's own emergence as a visionary, rather than merely pastoral, poet (*Visionary* 86). One explicit thematic commonality between Barker's “A Farewell to POETRY” and Milton's *Lycidas* is death. Milton's is a pastoral elegy, ostensibly for Edward

King; Barker's poem treats the death of her brother. Both poems amount in one way or another to extended meditations on human mortality being coped with through the consolatory possibilities prophecy opens up: timeless, deathless existence. This commonality also points to an important difference, which may rise to the level of rewriting. Barker's "A Farewell to POETRY" is not elegiac (the elegy occurs in the next poem in *Poetical Recreations*, "On the DEATH of my Brother. A SONNET"); rather, "Farewell" dramatizes the poet's turn to medicine in the hopes of saving her brother's life. What physical medicine cannot accomplish must be achieved by other means, a decision which leads away from science towards to prophecy.

Thus both *Lycidas* and "A Farewell to POETRY" announce major shifts in poetics—are, in a very real sense, artistic manifestoes—away from pastoral towards prophecy. Consider that Wittreich's reading of *Lycidas* emphasizes progression in two contexts, the classical and the Biblical: "process is figured through the transformation of an uncouth swain into a princely prophet, a transformation that finds one precedent in Amos . . . another . . . is provided by the parallel one undergone by Moses. To some, it has seemed that the line of development between *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost* positions Milton within a classical tradition, paralleling his literary career—its movement from pastoral to epic—with Virgil's . . . Milton probably had another analogy in mind, one that would set his poem within a scriptural tradition . . . Milton shows himself to be like both Moses and Spenser, the prophetic poets he is now ready to rival" (*Visionary Poetics* 83–84). Although the specific nature of the shift announced in *Lycidas* is subject to critical interpretation, the occurrence of the shift is remarkable in and of itself.

Barker makes analogous moves, though with key differences. In the first place, science/medicine, rather than theology, mediate the transition from pastoral to prophecy. In the course of making that journey, in the "process" (to adopt and adapt Wittreich's term) of

emerging as visionary, Barker takes a swipe at *Paradise Lost*. Paraphrasing Bartholine's treatise, Barker presents the argument that the eye's function was to prevent sin:

all which proves in vain  
To keep out Lust , and Innocence retain:  
For 'twas the Eye that first discern'd the food,  
As pleasing to it self, then thought it good  
To eat , as b'ing inform'd it wou'd refine  
The half-wise Soul , and make it all Divine.  
But ah, how dearly Wisdom's bought with Sin,  
Which shuts out Grace, lets Death and Darkness in! (29–34)

In Milton's version, Adam's watching of Eve prior to the fall—"Her long with ardent look his Eye pursu'd / Delighted, but desiring more her stay" (*PL* 9.397-98)—prefigures Adam's own decisive sin:

Bold deed thou hast presum'd, adventurous Eve  
And peril great provok't, who thus hath dar'd  
Had it been onely coveting to Eye  
That sacred Fruit, sacred to abstinence,  
Much more to taste it under banne to touch.  
But past who can recall, or don undoe? (*PL* 9.921–26)

Whether Barker has this—or any specific—passage from *Paradise Lost* in mind, the very act of poeticizing the Adamic story could not but evoke Milton. But which Milton—and to what ends?

The "Farewell" of the title amounts, I believe, to a rejection not of poetry itself but rather of Miltonic poetics. Barker, in a note, shapes a narrow reading of the poem by defining poetry in

a strictly classical sense, and then reducing that tradition to its material (use) value: “Yet I must dispossess thee of my Heart. / On new Acquaintance now I must dispence / What I receiv’d from thy bright influence” (4–6). Barker herself glosses this last image: “Having learned Latin by reading the Latin Poets” (n). Is there a less visionary, less transcendent poetics that this—poetry as grammar? Allusion, which plays a key role in the digression on anatomy, gives the poem its unique shape but at the same time rehearses a considerably different consideration of the practical salvific—indeed the quite literally healing—qualities of poetry, something perhaps missing in Barker’s view from the height of Milton’s great arguments.

Barker’s pastoralizing of Cambridge, enacted in “An Invitation to my Friends at Cambridge,” demonstrates Barker’s command of the Miltonic modes she intends to leave behind—or more accurately to progress beyond—in the “Farewell.” Here again, Milton’s *Lycidas* provokes comparison. The 1645 headnote to *Lycidas* establishes friendship’s centrality as the crucial organizing principle to which Milton anchors his experiments in prophecy: “In this Monody the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drown’d in his Passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by occasion fortells the ruine of our corrupted Clergy then in their height” (headnote). Raymond N. MacKenzie notes that Edward King, the Cambridge undergraduate to whom Milton provisionally addresses the poem, “was not close to Milton (and may not have been known to him)” (537), which MacKenzie interprets in psychological terms: “*Lycidas* articulates Milton’s own anxieties and questionings while saying very little about Edward King; thus the poem does not allow us to draw firm conclusions . . . Milton simply uses King as a kind of metaphor for or projection of himself and his own fears” (545). Whether read in psychological or theological terms, friendship in *Lycidas* provides a vehicle for the prophetic meditation on eternity and eternal life at the poem’s core.

Like Milton, Barker experimented with autobiographical fictions, both in poetry and prose. King and Medoff note “Barker’s tendency to recast personal experience in mythic or politicized terms” (17), a recasting on display in “An Invitation,” wherein, comparable to Milton’s *Lycidas*, Barker uses a Cambridge friendship to advance a rhetorical and poetic agenda. Where Milton’s prophetic pastoral builds to a regenerative Christian culmination—“So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high, / Through the dear might of him that walk’d the waves” (172–73)—Barker’s Cambridge pastoral is set firmly in a fallen world, where the pastoral impulse is figured not as salvific but rather as escapist: “From varying Modes, which do our Lives inslave, / Lo here a full Immunity we have” (17–18). Although artifice and interpretation, key facets of the pastoral mode, can create an image of paradise regained, the material conditions out of which the construction happens reminds the speaker of the world’s fallenness:

Yea such a kind of solitude it is,  
 Not much unlike to that of Paradise,  
 Where all things do their choicest good dispence,  
 And I too here am plac’d in innocence.  
 I shou’d conclude that such it really were,  
 But that the Tree of Knowledge won’t grow here: (39–44)

However, the original sin in this world, social iniquity, is a repercussion of expulsion; in particular, Barker underscores the cultural implications of legally barring women from a university education. In other words, pastoralizing Cambridge as an idealized refuge for learning—“Though to few Objects here we are consin’d, / Yet we have full enlargement of the Mind” (15–16)—only underscores Cambridge’s political materiality:

Though in its culture I have spent some time,

Yet it disdains to grow in our cold Clime ,  
Where it can neither Fruit nor Leaves produce  
Good for its owner, or the publick use.  
How can we hope our Minds then to adorn  
With any thing with which they were not born;  
Since we're deny'd to make this small advance,  
To know their nakedness and ignorance?  
For in our Maker's Laws we've made a breach,  
And gather'd all that was within our reach,  
Which since we ne'er could touch; Altho' our Eyes  
Do serve our longing-Souls to tantalize,  
Whilst kinder fate for you do's constitute  
Luxurious Banquets of this dainty Fruit. (45–58)

The tree of knowledge signifies the sin of legally imposed ignorance, a theme underscored in “A Farewell to POETRY” by the educative function of poetry—literally the means by which Barker’s speaker teaches herself enough Latin to read the classical medical treatises relevant to her brother’s illness. The post-lapserian iniquities, signified as and in turn signifying women’s lack of access to at least potentially salvific education, thread the poems together, which in “A Farewell” compels additional prophetic engagement. In the “Invitation,” the speaker does not yet turn to prophecy; instead, she remains fixed in pastoral confinement, which lends the concluding lines their critical dissenting energy:

Whose Tree most fresh and flourishing do's grow,  
E'er since it was transplanted amongst you;

And you in Wit grow as its branches high,  
Deep as its Root too in Philosophy ;  
Large as its spreading Arms your Reasons grow,  
Close as its Umbrage do's your Judgments show;  
Fresh as its Leaves your sprouting fancies are,  
Your Vertues as its Fruits are bright and fair. (59–66)

Directed to her male friends at Cambridge, these lines might well also be addressing the young Milton in *Lycidas* whose is prophesying about individual salvation and proper church governance on the occasion of his Cambridge schoolmate's untimely death. Recall as well that not only women but also Catholics were denied access to Cambridge.

Moreover, Cambridge facilitates prophecy in Milton's pastoral elegy. Quite literally, Camus processes in front of the Pilot, underscoring Cambridge's cultural role as training ground for Church of England clergy:

Next Camus, reverend Sire, went footing slow,  
His Mantle hairy, and his Bonnet sedge,  
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge  
Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.  
Ah! Who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?

It is precisely this kind of pledge—or vow—that Barker is barred from committing; the carefully reasoned theology of “An Invitation” reduced to the personal—to friendship—rather than to the structural or cultural—to politics:

If , Friends, you would but now this place accost,  
E're the young Spring that Epithet has lost,



And of my rural joy participate;  
You'd learn to talk at this distracted rate.  
Hail, Solitude, where Innocence do's shroud  
Her unvail'd Beauties from the cens'ring Croud; (1–6)

The allusions of “A Farewell to POETRY” open up more fully a context of pastoral frustration as an alternative educative space.

The allusive quality of “A Farewell to POETRY” sets up a different kind of classical tradition, and therefore evokes a different kind of context, itself critical of the Miltonic mode in striking ways. Of *Lycidas*'s allusive poetics, an essential method of prophecy, Wittreich argues that “allusion is the vehicle Milton employs to push *Lycidas* beyond local circumstance into the realm of the universal” (*Visionary* 87–88). Barker's use of allusion—or more broadly of reference—likewise pushes the circumstantial and the personal towards the ubiquitous and the historical. Medicine, classical and modern, rather than classical and biblical pastoral as in Milton's *Lycidas*, assume the authority of theology.

At this point it is helpful to digress into a consideration of the medical contexts of pastoral. Wear, discussing early modern notions of preventative medicine, surveys what Britons in the Restoration would have known and understood about connections between health and the environment. Central to Wear's argument is an analysis of John Evelyn's dedication of *Fumifugium: or The Inconvenience of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated* (1661) to Charles II, in which Evelyn records his motivations for writing the work:

to render not only Your Majesties Palace, but the whole City likewise of the  
sweetest and most delicious Habitations in the World . . . by improving those  
Plantations . . . [that] upon every gentle emmission through the Aer, should so

perfume adjacent places with their breath, as if by a certain charm, or innocent  
Magick, they were transferred to that part of Arabia, which is therefore styl'd the  
Happy, because it is amongst the Gums and precious spices. (qtd. in Wear, 201).

Wear identifies the medical context of Evelyn's plan to transport "the country into the city (*rus in urbe*)," noting "the common practice of the ill and convalescent of travelling into the countryside for a change of air and to escape the diseases of the city" (201), to which Wear ascribes a biblical precedent: "behind the idea of the *rus in urbe* lay, I think, the Garden of Eden. In a sense, paradise was the absolute measure against which all other environments were measured . . . the place where illness and death did not exist, and the smells of plants were most fragrant" (201). This Edenic figuration combines medicine and theology in a politicized pastoral setting.

The connection between pastoral, medicine, and theology in Barker's "farewell" is figured in the person of Richard Lower, to whom Barker was matrilineally related (King and Medoff 18). Lower, author of several medical texts printed after the restoration, was a figure of some minor repute in early modern British medical circles: "In Oxford in the 1650s a group of physiologist-experimenters put into practice the Baconian approach when they developed some of William Harvey's unfinished research topics such as the nature of respiration and of the blood. Some of the group, such as Robert Hooke, Robert Boyle and Richard Lower, then went on to London, where following the Restoration and the triumph of Anglicanism they were prominent members of the newly founded Royal Society, which became the institutional centre for the development of the Baconian programme for science" (360). Lower's commentary—

But ah, alas, so cruel was his Fate,  
As makes us since almost our Practice hate;

Since we cou'd find out nought in all our Art,  
That cou'd prolong the motion of his Heart. (101–04)

—contextualizes revelation:

But now, my Dear, thou know'st more than Art can,  
Thou know'st the substance of the Soul of Man;  
Nay and its Maker too, whose Pow'rfull breath  
Gave Immortality to sordid Earth. (105–08)

In other words, Barker, so keenly invested in—and aware of the power of—education, faces down its limits. Science can only carry us so far, Barker argues, before we confront the *theos*—the point beyond which human knowledge fails.

In the late early modern period, and indeed throughout most of the eighteenth century, death remained firmly in the purview of religion: “The time of dying was seen as a Christian ritual: the passing from this life to the next whilst beset by the temptation of the devil . . . It was not until the later eighteenth century that death became medicalised and physicians managed dying with the use of opiates; as the performance of the art of dying declined in the Enlightenment, so the need for the patient to remain rational lessened” (Wear 34). This fact leaves room for Barker to understand, study, appreciate, and even practice medicine--while still turning to prophecy to explain postmortem realities and phenomena. Illness as a cause of putrefaction had serious theological implications: “Death, it was taught, was the corruption of the body, but on the second coming of Christ each person’s body would be reunited in an incorruptible state. Bodily corruption was thus an essential part of the human experience, as was its subsequent negation when the divine promise was fulfilled and completed the career of a Christian . . . [there was] a close link in Christian teaching between putrefaction and dying,

expressive . . . of the facts of everyday life and revealed truth” (138–39). This point is made explicit elsewhere in the volume, in “On the DEATH of my Brother,” another of the poems at least superficially about Barker’s brother’s death:

Many bring in their Aid, but ‘tis too late,  
Grim Death had gotten a Decree from Fate ;  
Which retrograded all that great supply,  
Whose pow’rful Arms makes Death and Feavers fly. (33–36)

Education was an important part of her brother Edward’s—and thus the entire Barker family’s—existence: “Like other families of only moderate prosperity, the Barkers pinned their ambitions and concentrated their limited resources on the eldest son and heir. Edward’s academic career witnesses to the minor gentry’s pursuit of advancement through the channels of elite education”—the Merchant Taylor’s School in London; St. John’s College, Oxford; and Christ Church (King and Medoff 19). Edward’s untimely death had serious ramifications for Barker, financially and emotionally—but even leaving the biographical context aside, education’s limitations, as they do in Milton, assert a strong need for prophecy, a theological position Barker is working towards, as in these lines from yet another poem about her brother’s death, “On the same. A Pindarique ODE”:

For of all happiness I here despair,  
Since he is gone who Animation gave  
To all that’s pleasant to my thoughts, or brave:  
Ev’n my Studies he inspir’d,  
With lively vigour, which with him retir’d,  
And nought but their Bodies (Books) remain:

For Sorrow do's their Souls inchain

So fast, that they can ne'er return again. (95–102)

The figuration of bodies/books, of death/education—underscoring the material rather than eternal nature of both—facilitates the turn to prophecy in Barker, as it does in Milton. If both Barker and Milton conceive of a role for visionary engagement, the trajectory of those visions is quite different. Milton engages in the later, longer prophecies following his service to the Commonwealth; Barker resigns, following James II into exile in France. For Milton, poetry and vision are public inscriptions; Barker cloisters them from public view.

One of the hallmarks of historiographical development of the long eighteenth century is the notion that the popular dissemination of Enlightened principles slowly began to crowd out apocalyptic religious expressions. In the early modern period, plague was interpreted, even by doctors, as an instrument of divine retribution with links to the Fall: “English Protestants, especially Calvinists, added to the sense of original sin the view that illnesses were also God’s punishments for their own present-day sins. Illness because a sign of God’s providence, a running commentary on an individual’s or, in the case of a plague, a community’s behaviour. It was a rod of punishment and a warning, or it could also be a trial of one’s faith as it was for Job” (Wear 30). After the Restoration, medical writing about plague began to mirror a larger cultural trend to distinguish religion and medicine: “establishment thought newly evolving after the Restoration . . . allowed medical writers to concentrate solely on the natural causation and cure of plague” (Wear 292). Likewise, in the civic arena towards the end of the seventeenth century, public discourse, particularly the flourishing new genre of “electoral advice,” aimed at “counteract[ing] the politicized sermons of the clergy and dissenting divines” (Knights 171), employed a softer and gentler tone, “drafted for the most part in language far distant from the

eschatological discourse of the mid-century crisis” (Knights 174). Despite these developments in thinking about medicine and political in more secular ways, the apocalyptic orientation continued to guide many writers and public intellectuals, as the rise of enthusiasm in the first half of the eighteenth century, particularly Methodism, suggests. Barker’s Miltonic poetics, in which natural philosophy (science)—specifically medicine—feature prominently, represents the complex yet creative ways that enlightenment rationality and mystical religious coexisted in the long eighteenth century. In Barker’s work, we find emphatic and epiphanic treatments of the limits of reason and experience, both textual and empirical, which revivify the spiritual aspects of religion. Whether this brand of religion is entirely explained away by Barker’s Catholicism, which in the eighteenth century (and beyond) still carried the taint of superstition, remains to be seen: Barker’s poetry—both published and manuscript—suggests a far more complicated cultural setting, in which religion and science, like coy courtiers, were still learning to dance with one another.

Understanding the proximity—sometimes the violent juxtaposition—of medical with religious imagery in Barker’s verse benefits from some clarification of early modern British medicine. In the early modern period, religion exerted tremendous influence on medicine, while medicine continued to provide analogical material for theological disquisition, as the notion of Christ the physician demonstrates: “Christianity was from its beginning a healing religion. Christ, as a sign of his divinity, had healed the sick in body and mind, and the early Church Fathers and later writers used the image of Christ the Physician, and constantly employed medical metaphors in religious teaching” (Wear 30). Moreover, religion and its rhetoric were frequently employed in the apologetics of various and competing medical theories, remaining central to early modern conceptions of the human body, its functions, and its dysfunctions:

“Religion . . . was . . . an integral part of the debate between rival medical systems. It also remained a medical resource in its own right, giving rationales for illness and offering healing through prayer from God, if not from his saints or the sacraments as in Catholic belief” (Wear 34). When in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (IV) on the divine physician Donne cites Matthew 4.23 (“No disease incurable”), he is articulating one branch of medical thought in vogue in England at that time, the Helmontian: “There was no reason, according to Helmontians, why all diseases should not be cured, especially given God’s honouring of the physician, his mercy in providing medicine as described in Ecclesiasticus and Christ’s curing of ‘all manner of sickness and of disease’”(Wear 375; 375–76n68). The reason for religion’s centrality in medicine lay in the fact that “God . . . caused illness; he was a destroyer as well as a healer. The Fall of Adam and Eve brought disease into the world together with death” (30). This Adamic connection to medicine provides important context for reading Barker qua Milton.

The creation of Eve in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* contains an important medical reference. Milton’s source material is relatively straightforward, emphasizing as it does the act rather than the method: “Therefore the Lord God caused an heauie sleepe to fall vpon the man, and he slept: and he tooke one of his ribbes, & closed vp the flesh in steade thereof” (Gen 2.21; Geneva Bible). To a present-day American reader, the anesthetic nature of the passage seems obvious, but early modern commentators tended not to interpret this description in explicitly medical terms. Milton’s elaboration underscores the surgical, rather than the mystically creative, quality of the act, in which God

op’nd my left side, and took

From thence a Rib, with cordial spirits warme,

And Life-blood streaming fresh; wide was the wound,

But suddenly with flesh fill'd up and heal'd: (*PL* 8.465–68)

Thomas H. Luxon's speculative gloss on the phrase "wide was the wound" raises another medical context: "Does Milton intend to evoke an image of birthing or of caesarian birth?" (Milton Reading Room). Whatever its precise clinical nature, Eve's creation is depicted as a medical procedure—as a surgery. This depiction, presented in medical terms, is couched in a visionary context—one of the highest visionary contexts of the entire poem, given that it is truly epiphantic and not angelically mediated. Adam is in the presence of the godhead:

Mine eyes he clos'd, but op'n left the Cell  
Of Fancie my internal sight, by which  
Abstract as in a transe methought I saw,  
Though sleeping, where I lay, and saw the shape  
Still glorious before whom awake I stood; (*PL* 8.460–64)

Perhaps the most striking medical imagery in *Paradise Lost* is the almost epic taxonomy of diseases in book 11. Adam's postlapsarian education about death, which the Fall has generate, is extensive:

Immediately a place  
Before his eyes appeard, sad, noysom, dark,  
A Lazar-house it seemd, wherein were laid  
Numbers of all diseas'd, all maladies  
Of gastly Spasm, or racking torture, qualmes  
Of heart-sick Agonie, all feavorous kinds,  
Convulsions, Epilepsies, fierce Catarrhs,  
Intestin Stone and Ulcer, Colic pangs,



Dæmoniac Phrenzie, moaping Melancholie  
And Moon-struck madness, pining Atrophie  
Marasmus and wide-wasting Pestilence,  
Dropsies, and Asthma's, and Joint-racking Rheums.  
Dire was the tossing, deep the groans, despair  
Tended the sick busiest from Couch to Couch;  
And over them triumphant Death his Dart  
Shook, but delaid to strike, though oft invokt  
With vows, as thir chief good, and final hope. (*PL* 11.477–93)

Once more, as in the creation of Eve, the medical imagery is presented in a visionary context.

Michael offers Adam the Lazar-house vision so that the full implications of death may be understood:

Death thou hast seen  
In his first shape on man; but many shapes  
Of Death, and many are the wayes that lead  
To his grim Cave, all dismal; yet to sense  
More terrible at th' entrance then within.  
Some, as thou saw'st, by violent stroke shall die,  
By Fire, Flood, Famin, by Intemperance more  
In Meats and Drinks, which on the Earth shall bring  
Diseases dire, of which a monstrous crew  
Before thee shall appear; that thou mayst know  
What miserie th' inabstinence of Eve

Shall bring on men. (*PL* 11.466–75)

The result manifests Wittreich's definition of prophecy: the altering of consciousness through a reoriented perception—"Adam could not, but wept, / Though not of Woman born" (*PL* 11.495–96).

Analogous medical imagery is common in Barker's verse. There may be a biographical explanation for this imagery. Barker's beloved brother Edward was studied medicine at Christ College, a point emphasized in Barker's literary representations of him: "In the poetry and novels the Edward-figure is consistently represented as a medical student" (King and Medoff 19). When Edward fell ill, he was attended, unsuccessfully, by his fellow students, which Barker also writes about: "By the fall of 1675 Edward Barker was almost certainly dead. The precise date and circumstances are unknown, though in "On the Death of my Brother" Jane explains . . . that he died of a "Feavour" in spite of the efforts of his medical colleagues" (King and Medoff 19). Barker herself may have been some kind of amateur practitioner, devising and selling patent medicine among the London literary set: "A [Benjamin] Crayle publication . . . casts a tantalizing glimmer on barker's London medical practice. In a book he [Crayle] brought out in 1685 he inserted a notice that at his shop was to be had, for the sum of five shillings a roll, something called Dr. Barker's Famous Gout Plaister, which 'infallibly takes away the pain in Twelve Hours time, with the Paroxysm of the Distemper, and in time may effect a perfect Cure.' It seems at first improbable that a country gentlewomen as mindful of decorum as Jane barker would be selling a 'Famous Gout Plaister' under the name 'Dr. Barker,' but internal evidence for her involvement in such a scheme is fairly convincing" (King and Medoff 22). Illness reoccurs throughout Barker's long career. In addition to her brother's fatal illness, Barker herself, in her mid-forties, underwent surgery for cataracts, a procedure that left her nearly blind (King and

Medoff 23). Illness and politics intersect again in Barker's later years: Barker claimed that a rag spotted with James II's blood cured her of breast cancer, an argument she contributed to the Jacobite effort to have James II canonized and which serves as definitive proof of her lifelong commitment to the Stuart cause (King and Medoff 26–27).

To whatever extent the biographical record contextualizes Barker's texts, the fact remains that references to and images drawn from natural philosophy, especially medicine, help contextualize Barker's visionary orientation. Shiner notes that "Although it was common for seventeenth-century women to be knowledgeable about herbal medicine, it was rare for women to have the knowledge of current medical theories such as Harvey's circulation of blood. Barker incorporates her learned medical knowledge in 'Anatomy' and the apothecaries poem . . . One early nineteenth-century reader, Poet Laureate Robert Southey, commented that he was puzzled by Barker's 'odd anatomical verses' and her apparent desire to practice medicine" (xxiv). That the author of *A Vision of Judgement* would miss the vatic orientation embedded within Barker's "odd" medical poems may speak to the larger cultural ideological blindspot the early romantics experienced with respect to their female forebears.

"On the Apothecary's Filing my Bills amongst the Doctors," a multivalent poem that critiques marriage as a political and economic institution while railing against British society's prohibitions against university education for women, directly yokes medicine and prophecy, clarifying the visionary stance Barker adopts in the "Farewell to Poetry," where the physical limits of medicine—literally medicine's inability to prolong life—compel a visionary exploration about eternal life after death. In "On the Apothecary's Filing my Bills," the groundwork for that pivot—for the turn to prophecy—is laid.

The poem opens with the speaker reasserting her proximity to university-educated men: “I hope I shan’t be blam’d if I am proud, / That I’m admitted ‘mongst this Learned Croud” (1–2), an image that recalls the opening lines of “An Invitation to my Friends at Cambridge” (1–4). The pride she refers to, a mortal sin in the Catholic tradition, here constitutes an assertion of satisfaction that underscores the iniquities of the British education system, which bars women from attaining advanced degrees despite their skills and indeed potential service to the state. Barker’s political critique emerges from an extended consideration of pride:

To be proud of a Fortune so sublime,  
Methinks is rather Duty, than a Crime:  
Were not my thoughts exalted in this state,  
I should not make thereof due estimate:  
And sure one cause of *Adam*’s fall was this,  
He knew not the just worth of *Paradise*;  
But with this honour I’m so satisfy’d,  
The Antients were not more when Deify’d: (3–10)

In her argument for a politically just pride, the result of a woman performing duties reserved—by law—for men, Barker, treading Miltonic terrain, compares herself favorably to Adam, who in Barker’s version of the Genesis myth failed to appreciate his condition. This version of pride differs considerably from the Miltonic analogue, where pride is associated most closely with Satan. Adam’s sin, it is generally accepted, was motivated by fealty to Eve, a point feminist criticism of Milton has undertaken to dispute at great length. One of those earliest critiques may be Barker’s revision of Adam as ignorant of “the just worth of *Paradise*” (8)—that is, of the

value of justice or equality in Eden before the fall, which may be a direct revision of the version of pride Milton's Adam asserts during the bitter argument that concludes book 9:

and perhaps  
I also err'd in overmuch admiring  
What seemd in thee so perfet, that I thought  
No evil durst attempt thee, but I rue  
That error now, which is become my crime,  
And thou th' accuser. Thus it shall befall  
Him who to worth in Women overtrusting  
Lets her Will rule; restraint she will not brook,  
And left to her self, if evil thence ensue,  
Shee first his weak indulgence will accuse. (*PL* 9.1178–86)

Adam's argument against gender equality is precisely the kind of unjust pride, augmented on a socio-economic scale, that leads a society to bar women from its universities more generally and from the practice of medicine more specifically.

In *Paradise Lost*, the fall also disrupts—indeed closes off—prophetic vision. Adam's awareness of the loss of his prophetic powers through the acquisition of earthly knowledge marks one of the most poignant passages of book nine:

How shall I behold the face  
Henceforth of God or Angel, earst with joy  
And rapture so oft beheld? those heav'nly shapes  
Will dazle now this earthly, with thir blaze  
Insufferably bright. O might I here

In solitude live savage, in some glade  
Obscur'd, where highest Woods impenetrable  
To Starr or Sun-light, spread thir umbrage broad,  
And brown as Evening: (*PL* 9.1080–88)

Here the loss of prophetic vision, of the ability to perceive the ineffable and mysterious, compels a turn to the pastoral—more precisely it defines a kind of pastoral retreat or disengagement from the world.

In a sense, Milton sets the stage for the *Lycidas* trajectory here—vision emerging from the pastoral retreat, which is facilitated by Michael's mediated restoration of vision, which Russell Hillier analyzes in pointedly medical terms: "Michael's deeds of preparation prime the reader for the redemptive content of Michael's visions and teachings. Michael administers simples and unguents to Adam's eyes . . . grant[ing] Adam a supernaturally sharpened vision" by means of a herb, Euphrasy (*PL* 11.417–18), "otherwise named Eyebright, [that] is a medicinal plant with a regenerative, renovating effect in 'making old eyes young again'" (613; Hillier is quoting from the *OED*). The medicinal aspects of plants is connected to the larger culture of medicine and religion: "From the time of the early Church Fathers Christianity taught that it was permissible to use natural means to cure illness, with the proviso that the patient and the doctor pray to God to give healing power to the remedies being used" (Wear 31), which is itself caught up in the unique dynamics of the Fall. Another result of the Fall was a loss of understanding of the natural world, which had important medical implications: "in the accommodation between Christianity and medicine, God's bounty, his legacy of the creation, was taken to be for mankind's use . . . Although God had placed virtues in all plants, not all plants nor all their virtues were known . . . the ignorance that followed [the Fall] could only be overcome by long

and hard work over time” (Wear 79). Moreover, “The story of the Fall gave a Biblical origin for curative medicine. The means to ameliorate the consequences of the Fall, disease and death, were given by God to man but they could not restore the original situation” (202–03).

In Milton’s version, the fall and Eve’s role in it bear some responsibility for the creation of disease. Given the early modern legal and social prohibitions on women, the cultural significance of a female practicing medicine—even herbal medicine—cannot be overstated—is in fact a remarkably complex matrix of social, economic, and religious pressures. We should recall here that during the reformation, medicine was a contested space: “By emphasizing the value of learned medicine, Calvinists could use it as a substitute for the healing sacraments of the Catholic Church which they argued had no power, as well as presenting it as the proper alternative to the ‘magical’ healing of wise women” (Wear 32). Barker is doubly indicted in this dynamic, as a Catholic and as a “wise women” healing through herbal medicine—in the early modern period, Wear notes, “physicians attacked . . . charitable gentlewomen for practising medicine” (33). The gendered and the doctrinal attacks on women practicing medicine gives Barker’s “On the Apothecary’s Filing my Bills” its unique energy.

Barker’s female medical practitioner, the speaker of “On the Apothecary’s Filing my Bills,” likewise connects medicine with visionary prophecy. The virtuous pride she takes in her practice

transcends all common happiness,

And is a Glory that exceeds excess.

This ‘tis, makes me a fam’d Physician grow,

As Saul ‘mongst Prophets turn’d a Prophet too. (11–14)

An analogous yoking of medicine and prophecy occurs in “The Story of Tangerine, The Gentleman Gypsie,” in Barker’s novel *The Lining of the Patch-Work Screen* (1726):

Here they came to a Lady’s House, where they began (as usual) to tell fortunes among the Servants, who listned to them as so many divine Oracles. In the mean time the Lady of the House came to chide them for hearkening to those deceitful Vagabonds. Now, so it hapned, that this Lady had sore Eyes; which our Gypsie remark’d; and having before learnt many fine Receits of her Mother, took notice to the Lady of the Indisposition of her Eyes, telling her that she could cure them. Alas, said the Lady, I have try’d almost all things, without Effect and therefore have little reason to put any confidence in what you offer. But our Young Gypsie press’d her with such agreeable Arguments, couch’d in modest respectful Terms, that the Lady was persuaded to make use of this poor Stroller’s Receipt. Now, the Preparation being to take some days time, the Lady received the Girl into her House, till the Medicine could be made. This was a great comfort to our Gypsie hoping, perhaps, to have an Opportunity of ingratiating her self with the Lady. Things succeeded well; the Lady’s Eyes were cured, and then her Ladyship asked the Maid, why such a young Girl as she, did not rather betake her self to Service, than lead such a vagrant scandalous Life, and offered her to remain amongst the Servants, till some Place might fall for her; in the mean time she was appointed to assist in the Kitchen. (94–95).

The gypsie fortune-telling represents false prophecy, but the proximity of vatic sight—even of a false kind—to medicinal correction of physical eyesight establishes a pattern.



In *Paradise Lost*, Adam's vision is restored through salvific mediation, figured as a medical procedure; in Barker's "On the Apothecary's Filing my Bills" revision, medicine is figured in terms of scriptural prophecy, a reversing of the order of the terms in the analogy. The effect is a striking assertion of female agency, which Barker carries forward into an assertion of the healing power of her patent medicine, referred to in the poem's title:

The sturdy Gout , which all Male power withstands,  
Is overcome by my soft Female hands:  
Not Deb'ra, Judith , or Semiramis  
Could boast of Conquests half so great as this;  
More than they slew, I save in this Disease. (15–19)

Just as Michael's prophecy seeks to extrapolate the eternal good that will result from the material, immediate fall (Hillier 613), Barker's speaker prophesies future benefits from past misfortunes, in this case an unrealized marriage that compelled her to learn to practice (unsanctioned) medicine:

Mankind our Sex for Cures do celebrate ,  
Of Pains, which fancy only doth create:  
Now more we shall be magnified sure,  
Who for this real torment find a Cure.  
Some Women-haters may be so uncivil,  
To say the Devil's cast out by the Devil;  
But so the good are pleas'd, no matter for the evil  
Such ease to States-men this our Skill imparts,  
I hope they'll force all Women to learn Arts.

Then Blessings on ye all ye learned Crew,  
 Who teach me that which you your selves ne'er knew.  
 Thus Gold, which by th' Sun 's influence do's grow,  
 Do's that i'th' Market Phoebus cannot doe.  
 Bless'd be the time, and bless'd my pains and fate,  
 Which introduc'd me to a place so great.  
 False Strephon too I now could almost bless,  
 Whose crimes conduc'd to this my happiness.  
 Had he been true, I'd liv'd in sottish ease;  
 Ne'er study'd ought, but how to love and please:  
 No other flame my Virgin Breast had fir'd,  
 But Love and Life together had expir'd.  
 But when, false wretch, he his forc'd kindness paid,  
 With less Devotion than e'er Sexton pray'd. (20–42)

As in *Paradise Lost* book 9, the post-lapserian condition is given a pastoral setting, in this case through the conventionally pastoral name Strephon, the presumptive husband whose departure, like Adam's eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, manifests as a *felix culpa* [fortunate fall].

Much of the rest of Barker's poem, like most of the whole of *Paradise Lost*, is a meditation on that theological construct, which in some ways is the explicative objective correlative of all Christian Prophecy—or at least of prophecy in *Lycidas* (“So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high, / Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves” [172–73]) and in

*Paradise Lost* (“till one greater Man / Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat, [ 5 ]/ Sing Heav’nly Muse [l. 4–6]). Barker,’s take on the *felix culpa* reverses the *felix culpa* in Milton:

Fool that I was to sigh, weep, almost dye,  
Little fore-thinking of this present joy:  
Thus happy Brides shed tears they know not why.  
Vainly we blame this Cause, or laugh at that,  
Whilst the Effect with its how, where and what,  
Is an Embryo i’t’h’ Womb of Time or Fate.  
Of future things we very little know,  
And ‘tis Heav’ns kindness too that it is so.  
Were not our Souls with Ignorance so buoy’d ,  
They’d sink with fear, or over-set with pride.  
So much for Ignorance there may be said,  
That large Encomiums might thereof be made. (43–54)

Marriage, central to both Milton’s and Barker’s treatment of the fall, has unintended consequences—in Milton’s case the salvation of all humanity and in Barker’s, the salvific power of education and self-reliance, facilitated by practicing medicine. Here, we would do well to recall that medicine itself is an aspect of the *felix culpa* : “God in his mercy mitigated the punishment of the Fall and gave to humankind the means to alleviate illness . . . In a sense, Christianity gave medicine permission to exist; by incorporating it as a work of God, Christian theologians lessened the conflict between physical and spiritual healing . . . the Christian had a duty to look after the body, for it housed the immortal soul, and to neglect that duty affected the soul’s spiritual health. Not taking care of one’s health and not using the resources of medicine

also wilfully lessened the lifetime that God allotted to an individual; such action was tantamount to the sin of self-murder. however, medicines could not be used to prolong life beyond one's allotted span, and they could not, in any case, counter the will of God" (Wear 31—32). And so it is not surprising that the poem finishes with an additional comment on medicine:

But I've digress'd too far, so must return,  
And make the Medick Art my whole concern;  
Since by its Aid I've gain'd this mighty place  
Amongst th' immortal Æsculapian Race;  
That if my Muse will needs officious be,  
She too to this must be a Votary .  
In all our Songs its Attributes rehearse,  
Write Recipes (as Ovid Law) in Verse;  
To measure we'll reduce Febrifick heat,  
And make the Pulses in true measure beat:  
Asthma and Phthisick shall chant lays most sweet,  
The Gout and Rickets too shall run on feet:  
In fine, my Muse , such Wonders we will doe,  
That to our Art Mankind their ease shall owe;  
Then praise and please our selves in doing so:  
For since the Learn'd exalt and own our Fame,  
It is no Arrogance to do the same,  
But due respects and complaisance to them. (55–72)

Barker's visionary poetics underscores the salvific engagement of her revisionary project: the visionary mode as poetic medicine. Barker's medical verse revises hermeneutic structures of visionary poetics largely established by Milton while asserting a radical Catholic loyalist political stance counter to Milton's own radical Puritanism and anti-monarchical politics, suggestive of the extent to which the *body politic* remained a viable metaphor at the onset of the long eighteenth century.

## Chapter Two: Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Politics of Biblical Paraphrase

Rowe's engagement with Milton has received considerable critical attention. Studies by Sharon Achinstein, Sarah Prescott, and Paula Backscheider have served, essentially, to elevate Rowe to the pantheon of British Miltonists, where she has taken pride of place among the earliest of the major imaginative poet-critics of Milton. In this chapter, I pursue the thesis that Rowe undertook large-scale poetic visions based upon the Bible, a practice she, as a dissenter and a Whig, inherited from Milton, whom the Whigs were renovating in ideologically complex ways. Whereas Milton, who in the English language tradition had largely perfected such enterprises, drew largely upon apocalyptic prophecy, Rowe anchors her visions of divinely ordered British history in the wisdom tradition, innovating even as she follows. Rowe's sapiential prophecy reemploys the vatic orientation towards the didactic and devotional ends usually facilitated by wisdom literature. I examine several of Rowe's biblical paraphrases and devout soliloquies in pursuit of this thesis.

Rowe's political significance—by which I mean her status as a serious political, as well as literary figure, engaged in period-specific social and civic behaviors organized around her specific brand of low-church dissent—has been firmly established in numerous important critical and scholarly studies. It will suffice here to touch on a few seminal arguments by Sarah Prescott, Paula Backscheider, and Sharon Achinstein that inform the broader trajectory of this chapter. Of Prescott's numerous analyses of Rowe, her seminal essay "Elizabeth Singer Rowe: Gender, Dissent, and Whig Poetics" marks out the terms for considering Rowe as a political figure, deeply engaged in the literary politics of low-church dissent. "Rowe's first appearance in print," Prescott notes, "was in John Dunton's popular question and answer periodical the *Athenian Mercury* in the early 1690s. The choice of the *Mercury* was not arbitrary as Dunton was well-

known for his nonconformist sympathies and a substantial part of his catalogue comprised works by dissenters . . . The *Mercury* avoided any direct denominational label but displayed a strong allegiance to the Protestant Reformed Church and a broad sympathy with the nonconformist position. In terms of politics the *Mercury* was firmly Williamite and Whiggish in its sentiments” (174).

This context informs the ways that Rowe’s “A description of HELL. In imitation of Milton” challenge the idea that wisdom and apocalypse are discrete prophetic engagements, which provides valuable context for understanding Rowe’s position within early eighteenth-century dissent. There has always been a basic political component to both wisdom and apocalypse literature. As Wright and Wills point out, ancient Jewish and early Christian wisdom and apocalypse literature had a sociological reality, even if its precise nature can be difficult to reconstruct: “human beings in real social contexts produce texts” (2–3), they acknowledge, although “reconstructing those social worlds from the texts is fraught with what seem at times to be insurmountable odds” (3). In this context, scholars are rethinking the strict division of wisdom from apocalyptic literature, although “the notion that wisdom and apocalyptic represent fundamentally different categories, whether in literary genre or worldview, has persisted into current scholarship” (Wright and Wills 1). Reconstructing the social contexts and purposes of eighteenth-century literature, although still a fraught enterprise, is nevertheless a bit more manageable. To that end, Rowe’s “Description of Hell,” analyzed in comparison to its Miltonic source material and contextualized against other works in the Rowe canon, constitutes an example of this elision occurring in early the eighteenth-century British visionary poetics of dissent. Rowe’s engagement with Miltonic visionary poetics demonstrates that the British vatic tradition (or line of vision), like the Jewish apocalyptic writings it traces back to, contains

multivalent concoctions of, to borrow the taxonomy of composite parts George W. E. Nickelsburg identifies in ancient Hebrew apocalypse literature, “wisdom, prophetic, and eschatological components” (18).

Understanding the way dissenters coalesced various traditions to suit their own needs—the broader thesis behind this examination of Rowe and Milton, ground that has been already thoroughly covered—requires some understanding between the prophet and the sage as distinct yet related poetic ethos. It is useful to adopt some terminology from biblical literature studies here. The sapiential ethos, up and out of ancient wisdom literature, articulates some kind of “instruction about . . . human conduct” versus the prophetic ethos, which speaks of the prophet’s “concerns about future events” (Nickelsburg 22).

It is in this context that Rowe’s query in the *Athenian Mercury*, published on 1 Dec. 1691, which establishes her own stance on a primary cultural issue of the day, takes on additional nuances of meaning. “Whether Songs on Moral, Religious or Divine Subjects, compos’d by Persons of Wit and Virtue, and set to both grave and pleasant Tunes, wou’d not by the Charms of Poetry, and sweetness of Musick, make good Impression of Modesty and Sobriety on the Young and Noble” (qtd. in Prescott, 175). This passage articulates a hot-button critical issue of the day, questioning whether poetry is a medium serious enough to carry forward religious instruction. Prescott underscores its centrality as an articulation of (one of) Rowe’s core literary principles: “Rowe’s query about the efficacy and appropriateness of poetry and songs on divine themes as a vehicle for moral and spiritual improvement anticipates both her own poetic practice throughout her career and Isaac Watt’s later campaign to raise the stature of religious verse” (Prescott 175). Moreover, religious verse had already, at least in radical circles, attained such stature: it certainly had for Milton, but a substantive Tory and High-Church reaction against religious poetry stands



between Rowe and the theological poetics of *Paradise Lost*. That Rowe looked through the Anglican filters and back to Milton for inspiration constitutes a major critical intervention, one which seems to link her to the Miltonic visionary line. And indeed a number of Rowe's most political poems contain visionary elements. But in the *Mercury* manifesto, we see Rowe clearly aligning herself with the didactic ethos of the wisdom tradition and its near English cousin, the metaphysical wits of the early seventeenth century.

This choice needs to be clarified, I believe, in contrast to another of Rowe's poetic ethos, the visionary poet, which Rowe genders in an interesting way. The Williamite panegyric "Upon King William Passing the Boyn," for example, "offers an heroic and eulogistic compliment to William and figures him as victorious monarch and defender of 'Albion'" (Prescott 176), and it does so in magisterial, Miltonic (even proto-Blakean) visionary terms:

What mighty genius thus excites my Breast  
With flames too great to manage or resist;  
And prompts my humbler Muse at once to Sing  
(Unequal Task) the *Hero and the King*.  
*Oh were the potent inspiration less!*  
I might find words its Raptures to express;  
But now I neither can its force controul,  
Nor paint the great Ideas of my Soul (1–8; qtd. in Prescott, 176)

Where Prescott focuses on the way religious imagery helps Rowe "negotiate" the "dilemma" that "[w]ar is a distinctly unfeminine topic for a woman to broach" (179), I wish to underscore the Miltonic visionary orientation from which that negotiation is advanced. Rowe's forced modesty contrasts the prophetic authority and assertiveness of the *Paradise Lost* poet:

What in me is dark  
Illumin, what is low raise and support;  
That to the highth of this great Argument  
I may assert Eternal Providence,  
And justifie the wayes of God to men. (*PL* 1.22–26).

This deeply gendered “anxiety of influence” in the visionary tradition, which it should be underscored seems to have been imposed by external cultural pressures rather than being an authentic internal concern of the poet, gives additional credence to Backscheider’s analysis of Rowe’s religious poetry, examined in the context of a problematic critical history a gendered devaluing of devotional and other didactic religious verse: “Almost as often as critics and historians note the large amount of religious poetry that women wrote, it is judged inferior” (124). Yet even within the broader category of religious poetry, there is a hierarchy of subgenres, with heroic visionary poetics at the top and hymns at the bottom—metaphysical lyrics falling, by most accounts, somewhere in between. Rowe’s reworking and recasting of the wisdom books (*Song of Songs*, *Job*, etc.), it seems, were less problematic actions for a woman poet raising herself, on a wave of careful critical reading, creativity, and political authority, to “the highth of this great Argument” by another road—yet contributing to the development of significant poetic innovation that circumscribe the gender politics of religious poetic genres: as Backscheider notes, “New genres are created when old ones do not meet the needs of writers and their culture, and Rowe is a fascinating example of this phenomenon.” (123). This innovation is best understood in light of another critical point: Rowe and many of her poetic ancestors, as Donna Landry points out, dramatized (or epicized) biblical tales as a socially acceptable means of engaging with “questions of urgent philosophical and political importance” (qtd. in

Backschieder, 158). While the intervention may be more explicit in the long biblical epics like the later *The History of Joseph* or in the occasional and overtly political earlier poems, the wisdom poetics are likewise political: “Rowe’s devotional verse was not . . . divorced from her political beliefs. In addition to serving as demonstrations of personal faith, religious themes in poetry were often used to signal patriotic loyalty to William and the Revolution principles of 1688–89 . . . Like many Whig-oriented poets, . . . [Rowe believed] that biblical verse could serve a social and moral function to reform an increasingly profligate world” (Prescott, “Elizabeth” 73).—but the politics of revision more deeply encode the messages in a poetics of personal devotion and individual religious experience, rather than impersonal, historical, and eternized expressions epic and apocalyptic in scope. This shift in focus constitutes a major difference between wisdom and prophecy, yet at the same time that difference has to be understood as an elision—as a change in perspective and scope, but not a change in orientation and intent (or, if one prefers, purpose). Prescott identifies bulk of Rowe’s early poetry as the “less explicitly political pastoral and biblical paraphrase” (186), but its very implicitness suggests the grounds for understanding the line of wit as every bit the reformative, revisionary inscription that the so-called line of vision constitutes (at least among the older generation of Miltonists, like Wittreich and Shawcross). As Prescott reminds us, “The debate about the aesthetic appeal and moral efficacy of religious verse was directly linked to the overall Whig poetic agenda of constructing an alternative poetic tradition to replace the Tory-inflected neoclassical canon. The post-1688 canon of poetry and poets took its cue not from Rome but from Milton and was presented as not only a reformist mission but also a specifically British phenomenon: biblical verse was to be the saving of the nation and it was the duty of the nation’s poets to participate in this national reformation” (188).

Rowe's "A description of HELL" opens with a rather close paraphrase of Milton's "deep Tract of Hell" (*PL* 1.28). In the original, Milton depicts the moment of Satan's awakening, thus affording the reader a portrait of Hell as seen from Satan's newly fallen perspective:

round he throws his baleful eyes  
That witness'd huge affliction and dismay  
Mixt with obdurate pride and stedfast hate:  
At once as far as Angels kenn he views  
The dismal Situation waste and wilde,  
A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round  
As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible  
Serv'd onely to discover sights of woe,  
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace  
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes  
That comes to all; but torture without end  
Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed  
With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd:  
Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd  
For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordain'd  
In utter darkness, and thir portion set  
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n  
As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole.  
O how unlike the place from whence they fell! (56–75)

The volcanic nature of the hellscape (“A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round / As one great Furnace flam’d [61–63]) establishes the interrelated series of paradoxes that give the image and its doctrinal underpinnings such power: the juxtapositional incongruities—“With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum’d” (69) and “No light, but rather darkness visible” (63)—lend to the landscape description an analogous representational manifestation of more primary doctrinal paradoxes analyzed in *Paradise Lost*: fallen angels, divine degradation, and foreknown free will.

In Rowe’s paraphrase, the paradoxical nature of hell is synthesized; the incompatibilities that give Milton’s version its unique energy are smoothed down into a more coordinated, almost softer (although still horrible), portrait: “darkness visible” becomes

Prodigious darkness! which receives no light,  
But from the sickly blaze of sulph’rous flames,  
That cast a pale and dead reflection round,  
Disclosing all the desolate abyss,  
Dreadful beyond what human thought can form (7–11)

Likewise, the “Ever-burning Sulphur unconsum’d” paradox in Milton’s original becomes a space that is

Bounded with circling seas of liquid fire.  
Aloft the blazing billows curl their heads,  
And form a roar along the direful strand;  
While ruddy cat’racts from on high descend,  
And urge the fiery ocean’s stormy rage.  
Impending horrors o’er the region frown,  
And weighty ruin threatens from on high; (12–18)

The imagery of Rowe's paraphrase is horrible, but it is at the same time a fairly staid, rather conventional hellscape. The effect of this rewriting downplays the space and underscores (casts into relief) the presence of the damned, the (for lack of a better word) humanity of the occupants, whereas the dominating presence in Milton's original is Satan, through whom Milton makes profound doctrinal arguments. Rowe's aim is decidedly different.

In order to clarify Rowe's revisionary paraphrase, a brief digression about the poetic use of paradox is in order. In the early modern period, paradox was used (especially by the metaphysicals) in part to explore inherent difficulties in Christian theology and the manifestations of that theology in certain religious practices. Lewalski has argued that "the primary poetic influences upon the major devotional poets of the [seventeenth] century—Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne, Taylor—are contemporary, English, and Protestant, and . . . the energy and power we respond to in much of this poetry has its basis in the resources of biblical genre, language, and symbolism, the analysis of spiritual states, and the tensions over the relation of art and truth which were brought into new prominence by the Reformation" (*Protestant Poetics* 5). These same devotional poets make up the so-called line of wit, and the technique of paradox is a cornerstone of their poetics, which Samuel Johnson calls *discordia concors*:

wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtilty surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly

bought, and though he sometimes admires is seldom pleased. (*Life of Cowley* 25–26)

While Johnson's *discordia concors* does not, strictly speaking, correspond exclusively to paradox as a coupling of dichotomous figures for emphatic effect, critics like Wanamaker have loosely organized their analysis of early modern paradox around Johnson's seminal critical position: "*Discordia concors* is a concept that provides an especially direct and comprehensive approach to metaphysical wit. Since the combination *discordia concors* itself is an oxymoron, the idea is readily associated with certain stylistic techniques, such as paradox, pun, and contraries" (Wanamaker 463). The popularity of these techniques among early modern devotional poets suggests the degree to which poetry afforded the chance to work through difficult, often contradictory theological or biblical principles or ideas, a usage that extended as well into the eighteenth century, for example in the witty devotional verse of Elizabeth Tollet: "Elizabeth Tollet . . . has an especially broad range of paraphrases . . . Some of these poems . . . show the influence of the Metaphysicals in their portrayal of the paradoxes of the Christian faith and the believer's states of mind through fraught verse and wrenched word order" (Backscheider 135; Backscheider quotes lines from Tollet's "My own Epitaph," in *Poems on Several Occasions* [1755], 41).

Rowe's own familiarity with seventeenth-century devotional poetry is exhibited in another important paraphrase, "A Hymn to the Name of Jesus," which adapts and adopts material from Richard Crashaw's poem of the same name. Crashaw, associated even more closely than other seventeenth-century devotional poets with the mystical, made use of paradoxical imagery and other witty figures throughout his English verse, as when the tears of Mary Magdalene at the crucifixion is represented with a series of "unified contrarities" (Schwenger 65): "Is she a

FLAMING Fountain, or a Weeping fire?" (qtd. in Schwenger, 65), Crashaw asks in *The Weeper*, another important seventeenth-century devotional poem. Rowe's own interest in Crashaw, a mystical Catholic, would be interesting in and of itself, even if it did not constitute a major example of Rowe's broader revisionist poetics. Backscheider cites the paraphrase of Crashaw as evidence of Rowe's "experimentation and development as a poet," and although "the poem takes inspiration from [Crashaw's]" it is "wholly original and entirely hers" (136). Significantly, Crashaw's "Hymn" opens with a Miltonic echo (paraphrase may be stretching it). Rowe "omits Crashaw's Miltonic invocation" and takes up the poem at line 13, enacting an erotically charged expression of religious ecstasy (Backscheider 136) that includes its own staggeringly effective use of paradox:

If love, if joy, if gratitude can speak,  
If sacred rapture can its silence break;  
Yet once more let me tune my harp for thee,  
Thou source of the divine benignity:  
On this side heav'n yet once more let me sing,  
E'er to thy praise I set th' immortal string;  
In mortal strains permit me to rehearse  
Thy name, and with it grace my humble verse (1–8)

The paradox of the poet's mortal immortality at work in Rowe's opening demonstrates her own ability to rework and reemploy to her own ends the principle Johnson would later label *discordia concors*: "As a religious poet she created new forms, experimented fruitfully with existing ones, and was an important part of major transformations in the uses of religious verse . . . us[ing] existing kinds of poetry for personal, social, and religious purposes" (Backscheider 123).



Backscheider's analysis comes very close to arguing that Rowe's paraphrases in particularly and religious poetry more generally are deeply political enterprises, which aligns them with the social function of visionary poetics as Wittreich defines it.

While the line of wit has conventionally been separated from the line of vision, Rowe's devotional lyrics, drawing as they do on the line of wit as well as the biblical wisdom tradition (especially Song of Songs), Backscheider's analysis of Rowe's biblical paraphrases makes a strong case for thinking about the so-called line of wit in alternative ways, or at least of recognizing that the visionary line, with its emphasis on creative re-writing, isn't so different from how Rowe and others critically adopted the poetics of the Metaphysicals: "What Rowe learned from paraphrases of psalms and segments of scripture can be seen in the forms she made distinctively her own. Drawing upon the rich English religious poetry of the Metaphysicals and the poetry and ideas of the Bible, she creates new kinds of poetry. With very few exceptions the religious verse of the Metaphysicals is elevated over eighteenth-century poetry because of its intensity and energy. Overall, this is quite unfair to the women poets, and the best of them throughout the century feel free to draw upon these poets" (135). With her reworking of Crashaw, Rowe applies early modern devotional wit in conventionally prophetic ways, focusing at least implicitly on an apocalyptic eternity, using the language of divine eroticism associated with the song of songs tradition:

Is there within the bounds of paradise,  
A note of harmony compar'd to this?  
Ye heav'nly pow'rs, your gentle warmth infuse,  
And tell me what sweet eloquence you use;  
I burn in sacred flames like yours, and fain

Would talk and sing, in your immortal strain;  
My voice would mix with the melodious spheres,  
And please, with soft attraction, angels ears.  
Ye winds, to heav'n the glorious accents bear,  
For heav'n delights the charming name to hear:  
I'll breathe it with the morning's fragrant air,  
Its pleasing echoes shall the ev'ning chear.  
The fields, the lawns, and ev'ry shady grove,  
The sweet retirements, and delights of love,  
Shall learn from me the dear, inspiring name,  
And all be witness to my holy flame. (15–30)

In another important poem from this period, “A Pastoral on the nativity of our Saviour,” Rowe engages in a complex critical analysis, not unlike in substance from Wittreich’s own (although certainly different in form), of wit and vision. In this example, the latter surpasses the former, but it does so without supplanting. Put another way, in the pastoral figures Palemon and Uranio, Rowe dramatizes the wit-vision dispute. For example, Palemon’s reply to the appearance of the nativity star contains a fairly straightforward example of metaphysical paradox rooted in a theologically fecund context:

in the depth of winter, spring appears,  
For lo! the ground a sudden verdure wears;  
The op'ning flow'rs display their gaudiest dye,  
And seem with all the summer's pride to vie. (7–10)

The conventional nature of the image, constructed upon the paradoxical life-amidst-death trope, is usefully compared to other metaphysical treatments of the nativity, such as Henry Vaughan's "The Nativity. Written in the Year 1656":

A Tax ? 'tis so still! we can see  
The Church thrive in her misery;  
And like her head at Bethlem , rise  
When she opprest with troubles, lyes.  
Rise? should all fall, we cannot be  
In more extremities than he.  
Great Type of passions! come what will,  
Thy grief exceeds all copies still.  
Thou cam'st from heav'n to earth, that we  
Might go from Earth to Heav'n with thee.  
And though thou found'st no welcom here,  
Thou did'st provide us mansions there.  
A stable was thy Court , and when  
Men turn'd to beasts ; Beasts would be Men .  
They were thy Courtiers , others none;  
And their poor Manger was thy Throne .  
No swadling silks thy Limbs did fold,  
Though thou could'st turn thy Rags to gold. (9–26)

Likewise John Donne's Holy Sonnet ("Nativity"): Christ is paradoxically "Immensitie cloysterd" (1), leaving "welbelov'd imprisonment, / There he hath made himselfe to his intent / Weake enough, now into our world to come" (2-4).

Palemon's response is up and out of this metaphysical tradition, surely. Yet Rowe has Uranio and Menalcas in essence revise, by rhetorically overpowering with prophecy, the wit of Palemon. Uranio elevates the explicative exercise from metaphoric *discordia concors* to high Hebraic prophecy:

Nor without myst'ry are these joys that roll  
In torrents thro' my now prophetic soul,  
And softly whisper to my ravish'd breast,  
That more than all the tribes the race of Judah 's blest. (11-14)

This poetic development follows the Miltonic pathway, set out in the Nativity Ode ("On the morning of Christ's Nativity. Compos'd 1629."). In that case, the shepherds are the auditors of prophecy:

When such musick sweet  
Their hearts and ears did greet,  
As never was by mortall finger strook,  
Divinely-warbled voice  
Answering the stringed noise,  
As all their souls in blisfull rapture took; (93-98)

Rowe dramatizes the shepherds' reactions to the angelic prophecy, and by the end of the poem the metaphysical Palemon, having experienced the epiphatic vision facilitated by the angels, is made to articulate one of Rowe's strongest Miltonic paraphrases:

Great star of Jacob , that so bright dost rise,  
Turn, lovely infant, thy auspicious Eyes;  
This soft and spotless wool to thee I bring,  
My earliest tribute to the new-born king.  
With thee each sacred virtue takes its birth,  
And peace and justice now shall rule the earth.  
Thou shalt the bliss of paradise restore,  
And wars and tumults shall be heard no more.  
The wolf and lamb shall now together feed,  
And with the ox the lions savage breed.  
The child shall with the harmless serpent play,  
And lead, unhurt, the gentle beast away.  
And where the sun ascends the shining east,  
And where he ends his journey in the west,  
Thy glorious name shall be ador'd and blest. (73–88)

This is essentially an expanded reiteration of the grand muse invocation with which Milton opens *Paradise Lost*:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,  
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top

Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire  
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,  
In the beginning how the heav'ns and earth  
Rose out of Chaos: or if Sion hill  
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed  
Fast by the oracle of God (*PL*1.1–12)

Rowe's pastoral ends, tellingly enough, with the seraphic prophets participating in the adoration of the new-born Christ:

And we, the regents of the spheres, thus low  
Before mankind's illustrious Saviour bow:  
Astonish'd, in an infant's form we see  
Disguis'd th' ineffable divinity;  
Who arm'd with thunder, on the fields of light  
O'ercame the potent seraphim in fight.  
Thus humbled---O unbounded force of love!  
Subdu'd by that, from all the joys above,  
hou cam'st the wretched life of man to prove.  
And thus our ruin'd numbers will supply,  
And fill the desolations of the sky. (101–11)

In this poem, the witty lyricism of metaphysical theology has certainly given way to full-blown visionary poetics, although the angelic reaction preserves, embedded within its vatic scope, a bit of the old metaphysical paradox utterance, so useful in at least imaging the theological complexities of Christianity.

If paradox afforded the seventeenth-century devotional poets an effective means of handling complex theology, then Rowe's smoothing over (in her Milton paraphrase in Hell) the major paradoxes in Milton's description of hell, in light of her own ability to use paraphrase to great effect, may suggest that she is less interested in doctrine (and by extension denomination). In other words, it is possible to think about Rowe's erasure of paradox in her Milton paraphrase as a political move, analogous to other such moves, in other contexts, enacted elsewhere in the paraphrase poems: "The paraphrases in the 1696 collection of Rowe's poems are highly experimental apprentice pieces. They include six poems derived from miscellaneous verse from the Bible and ten canticles, poems based on the Song of Songs. *A Pindarick Poem on Habakkuk* is a typological poem . . . One of a group of poems she wrote praising King William, this poem takes its inspiration from the third chapter of Habukkuk, which celebrates God's deliverance of his people from the oppression of the Chaldeans" (Backscheider 127).

Rather than advance a theological postulate, Rowe instead highlights the human qualities of the occupants of hell. In *Paradise Lost*, hell is the place where Satan wakes up. In Rowe's paraphrase, it is very much a space occupied,

Whence issue long, remediless complaints,  
With endless groans, and everlasting yells.  
Legions of ghastly fiends (prodigious sight!)  
Fly all confus'd across the sickly air,  
And roaring horrid, shake the vast extent.  
Pale, meagre spectres wander all around,  
And pensive shades, and black deformed ghosts.  
With impious fury some aloud blaspheme,

And wildly staring upwards, curse the skies;  
While some, with gloomy terror in their looks,  
Trembling all over, downward cast their eyes,  
And tell, in hollow groans, their deep despair. (22–32)

In this way, Rowe's hellscape is more of a municipality, a geographic delimitation holding in a diverse population. In Milton we are seeing hell from the top down, as it were: Satan is the monarch of hell. There was at least some political purpose to the Whig depictions of hell: "biblical verse could . . . reform an increasingly profligate world by fully depicting the horrors of damnation" (Prescott, "Elizabeth" 73). But in Rowe's Milton paraphrase, we get hell from the point of view of the denizens, those under Satan's sway. Rowe shifts the focus, in a sense, from governance to the governed, which marks a significant Miltonic rewriting. In noting this revision, I follow Stewart, who has argued that "Rowe ratifies the Miltonic subordination of place to psychology, and her description penetrates the 'dark, detested, Paths of Hell' to alight on personalized circumstances of despair" (19). Indeed the bulk of the poem is dedicated to figurative, allegoristic depictions of types of city dwellers, provincials, etc. In *Paradise Lost*, the occupants of hell are fallen angels and erstwhile pagan deities, but Rowe's hell is occupied by types of human beings: "the atheist," "the libertine," "the wanton beauty," "the fool," and "the persecutor."

It is this last category, "the persecutor" or religious sectarian, that gives the poem its rhetorical energy. This type receives the bulk of Rowe's attention, and she identifies them as the worst of the worst:

Beyond them all a miserable hell  
The execrable persecutor finds



No spirit howls among the shades below  
More damn'd, more fierce, nor more a fiend than he.  
Aloud he heav'n and holiness blasphemes,  
While all his enmity to good appears,  
His enmity to good; once falsly call'd  
Religious warmth, and charitable zeal. (67–73)

By means of this description, Rowe puts her sectarian zealot on the same level as Milton's Satan, "th' Arch-Enemy" (*PL* 1.81). Milton's Satan assumes the higher vantage:

Forthwith upright he rears from off the Pool  
His mighty Stature; on each hand the flames  
Drivn backward slope thir pointing spires, and rowld  
In billows, leave i'th' midst a horrid Vale.  
Then with expanded wings he steers his flight  
Aloft, incumbent on the dusky Air  
That felt unusual weight, till on dry Land  
He lights, if it were Land that ever burn'd  
With solid, as the Lake with liquid fire;  
And such appear'd in hue, as when the force (*PL* 1. 221–30)

It is Rowe's sectarian who assumes the position of infernal vantage: "On high, beyond th'unpassable abyss, / To aggravate his righteous doom, he views / The blissful realms" (74–76). The comparison continues, as Rowe's sectarian exhibits the same prideful nature as Milton's Satan, who "aspiring / To set himself in Glory above his Peers, / He trusted to have equal'd the most High" (*PL* 38–40). Satan's own self-assessment clarifies more precisely the nature of his

pride: he possesses “A mind not to be chang’d by Place or Time. / The mind is its own place, and in it self / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (253–55 ). Possessed of a similarly obdurate pride, recalcitrant in matters of doctrine, of worship methods, and indeed of the proper role of religion in politics, Rowe’s sectarian enviously surveys the inhabitants of heaven, populated by the very people he in life persecuted as heretics:

and there the schismatic,  
The visionary, the deluded saint,  
By him so often hated, wrong’d, and scorn’d,  
So often curs’d, and damn’d, and banish’d thence:  
He sees him there possest of all that heav’n,  
Those glories, those immortal joys, which he,  
The orthodox, unerring catholic,  
The mighty fav’rite, and elect of God,  
With all his mischievous, converting arts,  
His killing charity, and burning zeal,  
His pompous creeds, and boasted faith, has lost. (76–86)

Rowe’s sectarian is described in remarkably nondenominational terms, indeterminate enough to allow zealotry of all kinds to qualify without singling out individual communities of Protestants (or indeed Catholics). To Rowe, the arch-fiend is singleness of purpose, uncritical doctrinal fealty, and intolerance, perhaps anticipating the “One King. one God, one Law” motif of Blake’s *Urizen* (1.44).

The political significance of Rowe’s Milton paraphrase, and of its attack on denominational zealotry, lies not so much in the content of the poem (although there is certainly

political consideration in the taxonomy of social types Rowe indicts) as in the exercise of writing the poem itself, which, in the first place, constitutes an act of political intervention and assertion. Prescott reminds us that “Dunton’s . . . *Athenian Mercury* . . . avoided any direct denominational label but displayed a strong allegiance to the Protestant Reformed Church and a broad sympathy with the nonconformist position. In terms of politics the *Mercury* was firmly Williamite and Whiggish in its sentiments” (174). This same broad nonconformist, nondenominational ethos remained fairly stable over the course of Rowe’s literary career: Peter Walmsley’s extensive study of *Friendship in Death*, the highly influential prose work Rowe wrote near the end of her career, invites us to think of Rowe as a significant religious polemicist, simultaneously instrumental in advancing the social and political agenda of Whig dissenters (Addison and Watts in particular). While Walmsley’s article briefly only glosses Rowe’s early poetry, including the Milton paraphrase—his focus is on the later prose (“In keeping with the tastes of her generation, Rowe writes extensively about heaven, but dedicates only a few early poems to hell, and these are primarily experiments in a Miltonic mode” [328n24])—Walmsley’s conclusions and observations apply as well to the earlier (and arguably more vociferously political) poetry.

Walmsley presents his study as a response to David Womersley’s (11) and Abigail Williams’s (14) appeal for additional, serious-minded consideration of early eighteenth-century Whig literature, long dismissed by scholars of the period. Rather, “Aesthetic expression should be seen as partisan and contested; we must become attuned to the submerged polemic . . . in even the most seemingly innocuous text” (Walmsley 316). As a dissenter, Rowe’s literary depictions of the Christian afterlife (including, as in the Milton paraphrase, damnation) engage with Anglican orthodoxy, which posits that life after death is ineffable and therefore beyond language’s capacity to depict. In other words, the very act of writing about recognizably human

life in heaven or hell is, Walmsely demonstrates, inherently political, in so far as Rowe's poetical revision of heaven comprised an aspect of a broader project of dissent from Anglican authority, secular and ecclesiastical: "death and the afterlife exercised the hearts and minds of all Britons in ways that we need to work to understand today" (317). Rowe's *Friendship in Death*, Walmsely points out, affords "an unorthodox and distinctively modern vision of heaven" that revises the establishment position: "Dominant Restoration theology—seeking to distance itself from more visceral Puritan eschatology—had tended to avoid discussing the afterlife with any specificity. Rowe, an Independent whose circle included Isaac Watts, shows no such squeamishness . . . Friendship in Death's novelty and influence, as well as its religious radicalism, lie in this bold vision of a heaven designed for the fulfillment and pleasure of the individual Christian soul" (319).

It is beneficial here to dig a bit deeper into Walmsely's argument, because the doctrinal differences between the Independent Rowe's and the orthodox Anglican establishment's understanding of heaven present a microcosm of the larger socio-political landscape, its recent history, and its development since the 1688 Revolution. In that history, of course, Milton played a significant role, occupying a notorious position. Walmsley notes that "Hell was a favorite theme in seventeenth-century homiletics—a rich discourse that reached its pinnacle in *Paradise Lost*—but fell into disfavor as the Restoration Church sought to distance itself from Puritan eschatology. Latitude-minded clerics far preferred to think about heaven, if they thought about the afterlife at all" (319). Instead, establishment doctrine, following Augustinian neoplatonism, cast heaven as ineffable: "Anglican thought about the afterlife in the early modern period was dominated by the younger Saint Augustine's neoplatonic insistence that heaven, in its spiritual perfection, must necessarily be unimaginable to those on earth" (Walmsley 319). In numerous

works of poetry and prose, Rowe advances “a new Whig way of thinking about heaven—one which turned to Milton for inspiration” (Walmsley 321). It is important to recognize that the early eighteenth-century contest between Tory Augustinianism and Whig apocalypticism, which looked back to Milton’s visionary poetics, reenacts a significant turn in the history of pre-reformation Christian theology. Bonaventure, following in the footsteps of Aquinas, was critical of the apocalyptic theology of Joachim of Fiore, arguing that “Joachim’s departures from an Augustinian view of history and eschatology spell disaster for Christian life as well as thought” (O’Regan 13)—and as Wittreich points out, in no uncertain terms, ““If Milton has an interpretive precursor, it is Joachim of Fiore” (*Why* 146).

Rowe’s depictions of heaven and/or hell were heavily influenced by the Whig project of reclaiming Miltonic energy in their literature of engagement, and Rowe is one of the movement’s strongest readers of Milton. As the Whigs enacted a kind of restoration of Puritan eschatology, it is understandable they would grant Milton pride of place: “Rowe’s poetry, which self-consciously returned to Milton, embraced biblical themes and did not shy away from stirring sublime religious emotions. Indeed, as Sharon Achinstein has argued, Milton remained Rowe’s chief poetic interlocutor throughout her writing career, and she participated in her generation’s ‘rehabilitation’ of Milton, by which ‘the poet was transformed from republican to Whig’” (Walmsley 317). Milton, specifically in *Paradise Lost*, advances the model for a Whig afterlife: “Addison argues that it is logical to assume, given God’s beneficence, that life in heaven should be in many ways a continuation of life on earth . . . In these scattered thoughts, Addison begins to adumbrate a heaven suited to human desires and abilities, and to suggest that the inhabitants of heaven are attentive to those on earth” (Walmsley 321). Thus Rowe and her Whig contemporaries Addison and Watts take seriously Milton’s proposition:

nor think, though men were none,  
That heav'n would want spectators, God want praise;  
Millions of spiritual Creatures walk the Earth  
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep: (PL 4.675–78)

Walmsley effectively contrasts Rowe's Miltonism with the Miltonism in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*: "If Pope pulls Milton down to earth, Rowe releases him, reasserting the legitimacy of a Christian epic machinery and encouraging us to take seriously the proposition that we are surrounded by . . . guardian angels . . . [and] caring spirits of the dead" (325). It is this engagement with Milton that shapes Rowe's later literary treatments: "In *Friendship in Death*, Rowe gives Addison's and Watt's reflections on heaven a rich narrative expression, describing a celestial setting that is fully available to human sense and imagination, where the souls of the dead continue to work toward personal perfection and enjoy the pleasures of a celestial society" (Walmsley 322). This "strikingly modern depiction of heaven" (Walmsley 326) is effectively underwritten by Christian heroism (Walmsley 316).

I have given Walmsely's argument in a bit more detail here so as to draw its broader points into my own consideration of Rowe's earlier Milton Paraphrase, which I see as significantly rewriting—by downplaying—the paradoxical difficulties of Christian theology that give the depictions of hell (and to a lesser extent heaven) in *Paradise Lost* their unique energy. The Christian heroism Walmsely sees at work in Rowe's *Friendship in Death* can be thought of as belonging to a more expansive Whig literary project, reinvesting in the epic Christianity Milton espoused(—I am tempted to follow Blake and say "created"). This reinvestment should be seen as part of a larger Whig historiographical intervention, which made liberal use of prophecy—after all, "Prophetic history was Whig history translated into the peculiar idiom of the

Books of Daniel and Revelation” (Juster 6). And so the numerous Miltonic epic imitations (by Matthew Prior, by Addison, and others) suggest that, like the Romantics at the end of the century, the Whigs were engaged in an expansive rewriting of Milton—in a visionary alignment of the sort Wittreich and others ascribe to Blake, Wordsworth, and others. Rowe participated in, and at key moments may even have led, this project, although her engagement with Milton differs radically from the prophetic revision/response of the later Romantic vates. Walmsley sees Rowe’s *Friendship in Death* as advancing “a new Christian ethical discourse that, rather than emanating from the pulpit, is negotiated through personal experience, effecting a radical dispersal of religious authority. And not only does Rowe claim her own legitimacy as a political and religious contestant; she also shows us characters who must, in negotiation with their own consciences and in correspondence with their loved ones, find their own moral and spiritual authority. The [Established] Church, its doctrine, and its discipline, have no evident role in their commerce with heaven . . . Rowe ultimately writes out a new Christian society whose bonds are affective and natural rather than disciplinary and conventional, a society of loving souls which extends from this world to the next” (326). In this analysis lies the seeds of a visionary yet sapiential orientation, a bringing together of the wisdom and the apocalypse traditions. This reading of Rowe finds support in, even as I believe it extends, a credible argument advanced by Dustin D. Stewart, who provides an alternative interpretation to the same critical structures and rhetorical moves underwriting the Wittreich visionary poetics model: “Rowe’s interventions in this world often unfold as poetic visions of the next. It is likewise through such visions that the writer alters [an essential term in Wittreich’s critical paradigm] the Miltonic legacy she advances” (14). This, really, is the value of the early Milton paraphrase, which advances this orientation in a number of interesting ways.

It remains, then, to consider how Rowe's paraphrases of Song of Solomon, perhaps indebted to "earlier books of devotional poetry by women" (Backscheider 127), are primarily critical interventions, in that they gloss the scriptural originals they engage. Yet the poetics of such criticism is, as Backscheider argues, vigorously inventive: "Her canticles . . . are equally varied and experimental . . . As these poems make clear, paraphrasing offers a number of educational advantages to the poet. Close work with diction, meter, rhyme, and structure are required, and especially where something both well known and 'sacred' is concerned, the poet can take few liberties. Scripture provided an alternative figurative language rich in different tones, metaphors, and symbols from those now-conventional Augustan secular poetry, and poets like Rowe drew freely upon both, mingling and juxtaposing as the content of the poems dictated" (127). Rowe's paraphrase of Canticle 8:6 extends the juxtaposition to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, constituting an alternative kind of *discordia concors* that in essence yokes the Miltonic apocalyptic with the sapiential instruction of the wisdom tradition:

O set me as a signal on thy heart!  
 And let the deep impression ne'er depart.  
 O let me ne'er by thee abandon'd prove!  
 I were undone, if thou shouldst change thy love;  
 I could no greater mis'ry undergo,  
 'Twere hell itself, the blackest hell of woe! (1–6)

In what may be another example of what Stewart has identified as a proto-Romantic interest in Milton's Satan—"Rowe does attempt to appropriate the sublimity that writers like Dennis, near the source of a long critical stream, discern in Milton's portrait of Satan" (21)—



Rowe's sapient intervention has Milton's hell in mind: the reflexive construction in line 6 loosely echoes Milton's Satan:

Me miserable! which way shall I flie

Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?

Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell; (*PL* 4.73–75)

Rowe's paraphrase of Cantic 8 can be contextualized in terms of Walmsley's argument about a Whig afterlife. The poem's concerns are overwhelmingly with the present, the here and the now, further supporting Backscheider's claim that Rowe's "most important early achievement may be the voice she creates for many of her canticles, that of the spouse in the Song of Songs" (128). In the original biblical text, part of the culminating lyric dialogue between the Solomonic lovers, the relationship is figured in terms of a seal: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame" (Song of Solomon 8:6, authorized version). Rowe's paraphrase expands the mention of death ("for love is strong as death") into a full-blown yet abbreviated Miltonic vision of the afterlife.

James L. Crenshaw defines biblical wisdom literature in a way that has some application in the context of Rowe's paraphrase of Canticles 8: "A . . . [key] feature of wisdom literature is its reliance on the intellect to cope with every eventuality. Hidden within the natural universe and the behavior of animals and people were secrets that enriched human existence. The goal of wisdom was to discover these insights and to draw correct analogies that would enable one to live long and well. It follows that such a quest presupposes a cosmos, a reliable order from which to draw lessons with predictable outcomes. Insights gained from nature or from the behavior of animals carried over into the human arena, and these truths perdured through the ages." (np) If

we consider the sexual desire that underwrites the primary analogical power of the Song of Solomon in terms of the animalistic drives Crenshaw discusses, then Song of Solomon can be interpreted as an application of the sapiential intellectualization to the art of love (either literal or allegorical). Rowe's paraphrase of Canticles 8 revives (breathes new intellectual life into) Satan's almost proto-existential meditation on his own recalcitrance. Whereas Milton's Satan exists in a condition that transforms his physical surroundings into hell, Rowe transforms the meditative scenario: the lover's absence creates a condition that resembles the actual hell of the afterlife. Rowe concretizing the ineffable, enacting poetically the project Walmsley sees her carrying out in *Friendship in Death*. The paraphrase in Canticle 8 in a sense rehearses *Friendship in Death*, and it does so by yoking the Miltonic prophetic tradition of *Paradise Lost* with the broader wisdom context evoked by the mere effort of paraphrasing Song of Songs in the first place. In other words, the intellectualization and the instructive purpose driving the wisdom tradition are applied to an apocalyptic project (imagining the afterlife), which as we have seen from Walmsley has an inherently political scope and aim.

Rowe's paraphrase is a visionary meditation on the absence of love as a kind of death: "Without thee, what were all the world to me? / I should detest the light and vital air, / And waste my days in sorrow and despair" (10–12). This passage recasts the Miltonic hell in a subsidiary paraphrase of Satan's meditation at the start of book 4, which hinges on the notion of obdurate pride calcified into hate:

to thee I call,

But with no friendly voice, and add thy name

O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams

That bring to my remembrance from what state

I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare;

Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down (*PL* 4.35–40)

Satan's meditation builds to a climatic explanation for the enmity born toward human beings, which paradoxically harmonizes (or elides) the differences between love and hate: "Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate, / To me alike, it deals eternal woe" (4.69–70). Rowe's is an infernal parody of the infernal parody of Milton's satan—or, put another way, a deep meditation on love facilitated by and mediated through the ideology of otherworldliness: the absence of love is the absence of life, and the condition that results is akin to damnation after death, for which Rowe adopts yet adapts Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In other words, the multi-modal and multi-author paraphrase enacted in the poem is a specific version of Rowe's larger agenda in the various paraphrases drawn from Song of Solomon, a direct analogue to the "visionary ending" (Backscheider 129) achieved in another paraphrase, *Canticle* 2.8, 9:

Is it a dream? or does my ravish'd ear

The charming voice of my beloved hear?

Is it his face? or are my eager eyes

Deluded by some vision's bright disguise?

'Tis he himself! I know his lovely face,

It's heav'nly lustre, and peculiar grace.

I know the sound, 'tis his transporting voice,

My heart assures me by its rising joys.

He comes, and wing'd with all the speed of love,

His flying feet along the mountains move;

He comes, and leaves the panting hart behind,

His motion swift, and fleeting as the wind.  
O welcome, welcome, never more to part!  
I'll lodge thee now for ever in my heart;  
My doubtful heart, which trembling scarce believes,  
And scarce the mighty ecstasy receives. (1–16)

The significance of Rowe's visionary canticle paraphrases, which yoked two discrete biblical traditions, apocalypse and wisdom while simultaneously glossing the prophetic poetics of Milton, may be quite mundane, focused intensely on the here and now of the earthly realm. If Song of Songs has traditionally been read analogically, with human sexuality figuring proper devotion to Christ, there has always existed alongside that reading the literal manifestation upon which the analogy rests. If we apply that same logic to Miltonic poetics—the so-called line of vision—Rowe begs an important question: to what end is the vatic enterprise aimed? Eternizing the poetic line is one thing, but without practical application of the kind implicitly and explicitly at stake in the wisdom tradition, Rowe may be aiming the prophetic back into the earthly—the social and political—spheres. Where Backscheider focuses her analysis on the eternal scope of the paraphrases—“the expansiveness—the ranging through time and space—that is characteristic of the best eighteenth-century poetry easily accommodates the religious sense of infinite time and domains, both solar systems and heaven, and combines here with the creation of an individual perspective with a personality and a time-bound, colloquial vocabulary” (135)—it is the political that gives the eternal its meaning, for as Walmsley reminds us, in the eighteenth century as today, religious expression is always political if we can bring the “submerged polemic” (316) back to the surface of our view. Rowe's is a kaleidoscopic vision, whereby the here and now only has its value in eternity (the moral thrust of her poetics); but paradoxically,

the eternal gives shape to the here and now as well. And so wisdom (moral instruction) and apocalypse (timelessness) must be balanced, as they are in the canticles paraphrases.

Another significant example of this balance—perhaps the most significant among Rowe’s devotional lyrics and paraphrases, is “The Vision.” The poet’s internal debate, weighing the value of various subjects and genres, dramatizes the Miltonic trajectory from pastoral and paraphrase to epic (and indeed epiphantic) visionary poetics:

‘Twas here, within this happy place retir’d,  
Harmonious pleasures all my soul inspir’d;  
I take my lyre, and try each tuneful string,  
Now war, now love, and beauty’s force would sing:  
To heav’nly subjects now, in serious lays,  
I strive my faint, unskilful voice to raise:  
But as I unresolv’d and doubtful lay,  
My cares in easy slumbers glide away; (11–18)

The visionary orientation is assumed fully by the conclusion of the poem—indeed giving the poem its titular authority. But yet vision is cut through with wisdom, rather than prophetic, terminology, including and especially the final image of the poem, the seraphic charge to the poet to become a prophet:

To heav’n, nor longer pause, devote thy songs,  
To heav’n the muse’s sacred art belongs;  
Let his unbounded glory be thy theme,  
Who fills th’ eternal regions with his fame;  
And when death’s fatal sleep shall close thine eyes,

In triumph we'll attend thee to the skies;  
We'll crown thee there with everlasting bays,  
And teach thee all our celebrated lays.  
This spoke, the shining vision upward flies,  
And darts as lightning thro' the cleaving skies. (36–45)

Imagery typical of wisdom literature is embedded in an apocalyptic vision—the vatic poet becomes sapiential teacher. The reward for instruction is eternal life and the fuller revelation of divine order and truth. Note as well the emphasis on genre embedded within the angelic message: “songs” may be taken as a catch-all term for poetry, even vatic poetry, yet at the same time, given Rowe’s self-conscious and self-directed understanding of the British poetic tradition, its past and its likely future, “songs” may also quite literally signify the hymn and devotional tradition that Rowe, as Backscheider has demonstrated, did so much to alter and advance.

The Devout Soliloquies, in particular Soliloquy IV, serve as a kind of culminating moment of *discordia concors*, a yoking together of the wisdom and apocalypse traditions.

Too low my artless verse, too flat my lays,  
To reach thy glory, and express thy praise;  
Yet let me on my humble reed complain,  
And mourn thy absence in a pensive strain;  
My own soft cares permit me to rehearse,  
And with thy name adorn my humble verse.  
The streams shall learn it, and the gentle breeze  
On its glad wings shall waft it thro' the trees.  
The list'ning nymphs, instructed by my flame,

Shall teach their hearts to make a nobler claim;  
The swains no more for mortal charms shall pine,  
But to celestial worth their vows resign.  
The fields and woods the chaste retreats shall prove  
Of sacred joys, and pure, immortal love;  
And angels leave their high abodes again,  
To grace the rural seats, and talk with men. (1–16)

I believe the interpretive framework I have sketched out in this chapter, applied to Soliloquy IV, lends additional credence to—and indeed helps clarify the reasons behind—Bakscheider’s observation that in the devout soliloquies Rowe “shows an astonishing range and control of emotion, from gentle pastoral to ecstatic sublime” (170). Indeed the innovations of the soliloquies is Bakscheider’s major focus (and contribution to Rowe studies), which gets articulated in terms reminiscent—yet different as well—from Wittreich’s own critical discourse:

Rowe, like the other poets of the first third of the century, adapts respected forms but wrenches them into new uses and mobilizes them to create her individual, distinctive voice and to mediate religion through them. By doing so, she expresses her identity and subjectivity but also breaks down boundaries between this world and the next, exactly what she wanted to do in the soliloquies. (171)

Note the similarities of Bakscheider’s analysis to Wittreich’s discussion of visionary strategies, the former clarifying the latter: “Prophecy,” Wittreich argues, “for all its variables, contains a set of thematic constants: it postulates a providential pattern for a creation that in the course of history has become deformed. The prophet’s objective is to re-form history . . . Since Apocalypse occurs only after mankind is readied for it, the prophet submits others to the

processes of purgation and purification which, inwardly directed, result in mankind's transformation into a race of visionaries. Committed to brightening the mind, to exalting and purifying all its faculties, the prophet employs a series of strategies designed to force open the doors of perception" (*Visionary* 26). For Backscheider, Soliloquy IV "is a virtuoso example" of how "Rowe employs the various poetic voices in which she has written in wholly original ways" (170). Although "Not one of the best of the devout soliloquies, it nevertheless has a sureness of line and conception that attests to her poetic mastery. Beginning in the poet's voice, then sliding smoothly into the pastoral mode, the poem moves through the kinds of love . . . Because pastoral love is human but colored by idealizing, she can treat it economically, almost elliptically, and have the swains learn the pure, sacred love of God and angels" (171)

While Backscheider's savvy analysis, a more justly historicized version of Wittreich's, does explicate Soliloquy IV in the context of the genre innovations Rowe performed with the Devout Soliloquies in toto, it is the strikingly un-Miltonic—or rather, trans-Miltonic—claim at the heart of the poem—starting at the exact middle point of the poem, that manifests the sapiential prophet's innovative and reforming orientation: "The list'ning nymphs, instructed by my flame, / Shall teach their hearts to make a nobler claim" (9–10).

By way of concluding, let me glance at how this instruction occurred. As a number of scholars have noted, Rowe exerted considerable influence in colonial America, where the education and literary practices of women was a fraught issue: "Conservatives might have been worried that women would read the 'wrong' things, but much of what women read was religious. Southern women's libraries included sermons, prayer books, psalms, Elizabeth Burnet's *A Method of Devotion*, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe's works . . . Esther Burr was so taken by Rowe's work that she fantasized [sic] about conversing with her. Women also ventured to



publish their own ecstatic and poetic visions of death, salvation, and heaven” (Gundersen 103). Here we get a glimpse of the afterlife of Rowe’s sapiential vision, satisfying, with key differences of genre and poetics, Wittreich’s qualifications for membership in the line of vision, namely subsequent inheritors: “The interconnectedness of the tradition requires that the poet-prophet give to his [in this case *her*] precursors the same diligent study that Daniel gave to Jeremiah and that John of Patmos gave to Daniel” (*Milton* xv)— and that early American women gave to Rowe and that Rowe gave to Milton.

### Chapter Three: Mary Leapor's "Crumble Hall" as Visionary Text

Mary Leapor's intertextual engagement with Alexander Pope has impelled much of the existing scholarship on Leapor. Major treatments by Greene (137–44) and Landry (107–19), as well as seminal articles by Rizzo (332ff), Chaden (*passim*), and Dalporto (234–35), devote considerable attention to the relations between Leapor and Pope. While there is disagreement about the ideological nature of the intertextuality—particularly between Greene, who interprets the relationship as essentially conservative, and Landry, who reads Leapor's revisions of Pope as significantly more radical (Chaden 31)—the broad contours of Leapor's utilization of Pope can be understood in terms of conscious imitation and critical revision: "What [Leapor] gained from reading [Pope] was not just a model for writing poetry, but a model for viewing herself as a poet. This model, with its emphasis on social commentary and the critical perspective of an outside observer, shapes both the form and content of Leapor's poetry. And ultimately, this model shapes Leapor's critique of Pope as well" (Chaden 32). This kind of intertextuality, marked by simultaneous modeling and rewriting, suggests the potential applicability of a visionary poetics framework, such as that developed by Wittreich, to Leapor's work.

The prophetic tradition outlined by Wittreich operates on the principle of corrective rewriting, originating with John of Patmos's apocalyptic rewriting of the foundational Old Testament prophecies. This kind of vatic engagement, which is simultaneously imitative (and therefore critical) as well as corrective (and therefore creative) is analogously exemplified in the standard critical interpretation of the Leapor-Pope engagement, an engagement that at least one modern Leapor scholar puts in religious terms: "'On Mr. Pope's Universal Prayer,' 'The Libyan Hunter, A Fable,' and 'Epistle to Artemisia' establish the basis for understanding Pope's influence on Leapor, demonstrating both their shared religious values and their similar stances as

poets. Leapor, like Pope, uses her position as an outsider to speak what she sees as the truth. When we examine these poems, now widely recognized as responses to Pope, we find that she borrows procedures that help her apply those values universally. Where she departs from his procedures, she does so in order to reaffirm values that he has only selectively applied” (Chaden 38). This reading affirms the outside status of each poet: Pope as Catholic, Leapor as lower class.

Because Milton is at the heart of the British visionary tradition (or “line of vision”) Wittreich outlines, Miltonic references in Pope and Leapor become, in the context I am sketching out here, especially attractive. Pope’s own interest in Milton has been well documented: “Pope yields to no one in his age in the extent and soundness of his knowledge of Milton, displaying throughout his lifetime an intelligent but never idolatrous admiration for the many facets of Milton’s genius and works” (Lewalski 29). Critics disagree about the precise nature of Pope’s engagement with Milton—a more detailed analysis of the line of wit versus line of vision argument follows later. The prophetic nature of *Windsor Forest*, for instance, has elicited a great deal of critical attention. And the Epistle to Lord Burlington, a touchstone in the pastoral country-house genre, contains one of Pope’s most direct Miltonic references (Milton is mentioned by name), and in the mind of at least one critic qualifies as prophecy: “Past and future are imaginatively present [in the Burlington Epistle] . . . the future will see the pleasure garden replaced by the culture of the land which reaches the very walls of the villa. But by what specific means? It is not customary to link Pope with the visionary tradition in English art, but what else is this idealization of the future but a vatic prophecy?” (Kelsall n.p.). Leapor’s own country-house poem “Crumble-Hall” significantly re-writes Pope’s Epistle to Burlington: “Leapor’s negative assessment of the landowner’s landscaping plans is part of a tradition that harks back to Pope’s poetic censuring of the kind of improvements that destroy ideals of mutual obligation and

harmonious social relations. Leapor, however, reorients Pope's critique from a servant's standpoint and compels the reader to see that the laborers on these estates undergoing restructuring had a significant stake in defending a way of life that emphasized landlord benevolence and hands-on concern" (Dalporto 234–35). The "Crumble-Hall" engagement with Pope's Burlington epistle affords the chance to examine two substantive Miltonic reference points.

Leapor's "Crumble-House" deploys several conventions of Miltonic visionary poetics. To begin with, the poem is deeply intertextual, carrying forward a broad revisionary project that in essence rewrites several touchstone precursor texts, including Jonson's "To Penshurst" and Pope's "Epistle to Burlington." Scholarly consensus acknowledges the subversive, even radical, nature of Leapor's rewriting, which foregrounds the conventionally hidden issue of labor in the country-house genre: "Most of the criticism . . . has focused on the ways in which the poem subverts the tradition of country-house poetry by its behind-the-scenes-look at domestic labor from the perspective of one of its workers" (Dalporto 228). The tradition Leapor engages, marked particularly by Jonson and Pope, is an overtly political genre, which encodes analyses of power relations within formulaic considerations of landscape, hospitality, architecture, aristocratic legacy, and patronage. Because Leapor's "Crumble-House" radically rewrites Pope's country-house verse, then the "visionary landscape" (Kelsall 161-174) of Pope's country-house poetry, replete with Miltonic and Spenserean engagements, affords an illustrative vantage from which to trace and assess Leapor's class-conscious reworking of the Miltonic visionary mode. Moreover, by isolating the visionary poetics operating in "Crumble-Hall," we can advance Paula Backscheider's salient claim that "Contemplating that eighteenth-century religious poetry was

written between that of John Milton and William Blake might lead us to believe that we should take it more seriously and admit that it is a major type of eighteenth-century poetry” (124).

In this light, “Crumble-Hall”’s Miltonic significance becomes remarkable for what the poem doesn’t say. Leapor’s rewriting of Pope’s Burlington Epistle erases a major reference to Milton. Before examining the specific nature of Leapor’s Miltonic and Popean revision, it is beneficial to establish Pope’s own country-house poetics.

The Burlington Epistle exemplifies Pope’s broader use of country-house genre conventions in particular and his own investment in estate-culture more generally to veil potentially controversial socio-political critiques: “Pope’s increasing hostility to the Hanoverian monarchy and especially to the government of the First Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, drew him progressively into opposition politics and many of the great estates within the circle of his acquaintance can be associated with those alienated from the regime: Lord Peterborough at Bevis Mount, Lord Bathurst at Cirencester Park and Risks, Viscount Bolingbroke at Dawley Farm, Viscount Cobham’s ‘patriot’ circle at Stowe, and, more generally, Ralph Allen at Prior Park, Mrs Henrietta Howard at Marble Hill, and the Digby family at Sherborne Castle” (Kelsall n.p.). As the Burlington epistle marks a direct point of contact between Pope and Leapor—“Crumble-Hall essentially rewrites the Epistle to Burlington—the intertextual engagement is politically significant, especially as a criticism of the intellectual limitations of the ruling class.

It is worth noting that Pope’s Epistle is already a significant rewriting of the country-house poem tradition, as that genre was conventionally practiced in the early modern period:

One need only compare traditional English ‘country house’ poetry to perceive what is not there in Pope. The convention was one of exemplary panegyric of great houses and estates. Classical culture blends with feudal traditions of organic

hierarchy: witness, from the seventeenth century, Ben Jonson's *To Penshurst*, Thomas Carew's *To Saxham*, Andrew Marvell's *Upon Appleton House*, Robert Herrick on Rushden, Charles Cotton on Chatsworth. But for Pope the exemplary estate is his own five acres at Twickenham, a model landholding equivalent to the few acres of King Alcinous in Pope's *Odyssey* . . . Now a linen-draper's son provides the touchstone of moral worth" (Kelsall n.p.).

Pope's own social mobility and working-class origins inform the poetics Kelsall's essay contextualizes as "a major disruption of tradition" (n.p.)—and Leapor's revisions of Pope will carry forward this class-conscious and class-specific vatic project.

In the description of Timon's villa, which Pope uses to signify "the Principles of a false Taste of Magnificence" (n15), aristocratic book collecting is mocked using precise terms:

His *Study*? with what Authors is it stor'd?  
In Books, not Authors, curious is my Lord;  
To all their *dated* Backs he turns you round,  
These *Aldus* printed, those *Du Suëil* has bound.  
Lo some are *Vellom*, and the rest as good  
For all his Lordship knows, but they are Wood.  
For *Lock* or *Milton* 'tis in vain to look,  
These shelves admit not any modern book. (131–38)

Kelsall's reading of the lines is the standard one, touching on both the political and the religious contexts underwriting the critique: "Timon's vanity and folly ultimately feed on intellectual ignorance, for his library is noted for its bindings, not for the contents of the books . . . Compare Pope's verse, steeped in catholic, humanistic learning. The two modern authors whose absence

from Timon's collection Pope notes are John Locke, the philosopher of those rights to life, liberty, and property which the American revolutionary vision demanded for 'the new world' (in the teeth of militant Hanoverian opposition); and Milton, the poet of *Paradise Lost* and champion of freedom of speech and republican liberty" (n.p).

Pope's country-house poetics vitally contextualizes Leapor's own reworking of the form. For example, Leapor affords her reader a remarkably similar view accompanied by analogous commentary:

Here *Biron* sleeps, with Books encircled round;

And him you'd guess a Student most profound.

Not so---in Form the dusty Volumes stand:

There's few that wear the Mark of *Biron*'s Hand. (90–93)

This passage, although not directly explicated by Chaden, demonstrates Chaden's broader thesis, that "'Crumble Hall' . . . modifies Pope's amelioristic method of closure to conclude an argument more critical of the social order than her mentor's" (41). While the broader critique of aristocratic pseudo-intellectualism is consistent in both, subtle differences point to Leapor's revisionary aims. The behavior Pope depicts (and mocks) is book collecting, where the artifactual and indeed artistic nature of the physical volume, which Pope indicates by focusing on book binding, transcends its content. Leapor, on the other hand, depicts a more prosaic condition of disuse, symbolized by dust.

Aristocratic politics continues to shape "Crumble-Hall." Biron is the son of the lord of the manor, whereas Pope's Timon is the lord himself. In this way Leapor's overarching concern with generational stewardship and, to borrow a phrase currently in vogue, sustainability, emerges: "Leapor's critique . . . demonstrates how complex socioeconomic changes on the

country estate were being negotiated through the landscape in the eighteenth century . . . [and] how the aesthetics of landscape improvement were implicated in the dislocation of the laboring poor from the land” (Dalporto 228). The gentrified aristocratic economics underwriting the poem constitute one of the “complex socioeconomic changes” Leapor criticizes, in this case figured as the attitudes of the upper classes to their books: Timon’s collection, when passed along to Biron’s generation, loses even its value as an aesthetic object. The disuse of books must have struck the working-class Leapor, whose own access to books was always contingent, as utterly unconscionable.

In “Crumble-House,” books contribute to the epistemological reality of the poem. Knowledge is the result of experience and behavior, not surprising given the working-class perspective used throughout the poem: “Its Groves anon---its People first we sing” (111), particularly the laborers keeping the estate operational. However, the transmission of knowledge, once acquired through experience, depends upon a “republic of letters,” a shared body of texts forming both a grammar and a lexicon. Experiential referents and signifying references give the poem its structure and its substance. What results is a radical hybridity of laborers typified as classical pastoral figures. Most of Leapor’s serious critics (and indeed scholars of working-class poetry more broadly) have focused on this poeticizing of labor; it is also a kind of serious revision or rewriting, reinterpreting a literary tradition, in this case classical pastoral, in order to achieve a socio-cultural reorientation, whereby the reader is confronted with new knowledge in familiar terms.

Contextualized against this revisionary strategy, the Mitonic erasure takes on an important vatic significance. In “Crumble-Hall,” as in Timon’s library (“For *Lock* or *Milton* ‘tis in vain to look” [137]), no direct reference to Milton exists, which is striking given the explicit



nature of the Miltonic reference in the precursor text, Pope's Epistle to Burlington. Pope's Milton, paired with the enlightenment heavyweight John Locke, represents modern, even radical, thinking—republican in its implications, if not in its direct expression. The aristocratic, Anglican Timon—for whom books are art objects only, signifiers of class status and the old order rather than revolutionary instruments of disruption and revision—understandably excludes Milton from his shelves. Less clear is why Leapor performs a similar exclusion in her poem, especially since she is clearly writing in response to Pope. We should consider whether Leapor's Milton, filtered through Pope, no longer figures experiential knowledge, providing a lexicon for representing knowledge; rather, the Miltonic engagement—the radical republican visionary he is in Pope's epistle to Burlington—is a new kind of experience, a new referent.

To clarify, Pope references Milton, but Leapor becomes Miltonic, enacting the prophetic enterprise (or labor) through creative rewriting, representing a mode of structural authority deriving from the “tradition” of visionary writing Milton helps define and develop. This structural becoming or transfiguration provides the framework for “Crumble-Hall”'s most overtly vatic image, a passage that also marks the boundary between the poem's consideration of interior versus exterior space:

No farther---Yes, a little higher, pray:  
 At yon small Door you'll find the Beams of Day,  
 While the hot Leads return the scorching Ray.  
 Here a gay Prospect meets the ravish'd Eye:  
 Meads, Fields, and Groves, in beauteous Order lie.  
 From hence the Muse precipitant is hurl'd,  
 And drags down *Mira* to the nether World.(102–08)

The culminating image is one of expulsion following revelation, a typical prophetic: in the pseudepigrapha, for example, prophets experience the divine after some kind of pleasant or salvific ascent, but the end of revelation is marked by a violent tearing away and a falling back to the earth.

To better understand the prophetic nature of the ascent-expulsion dynamic in “Crumble-Hall,” consider as analogue the extracannonical Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, which “recounts Isaiah’s vision during his ascent through the seven heavens, with an angel as his guide,” and which influenced Milton’s own prophetic writings, especially *Paradise Lost* (Labriola 107). Isaiah’s prophetic orientation is an ordered process of ascensions through the seven heavens, until the godhead is approached. After experiencing an apocalyptic vision of the degradation and subsequent ascension of the Son of God, Isaiah is sent back down the hierarchy of heavens: “And I saw also the angel of the Holy Spirit sitting on the left hand. And this angel said to me, Isaiah, son of Amoz, I set you free; for you have seen what no mortal man has ever seen before. Yet you must return to your garments of the flesh until your days are completed. Then will you *come up* here” (11:33-35; emphasis added).

A Miltonic context links the mediates between the Hebraic and the modern. Wittreich has classified Milton’s entire canon as essentially a poetic equivalence to prophecy (*Visionary Poetics* 79–80), involving the ecstatic acquisition of hidden knowledge, which compels for example, the ending of *Il Penseroso*:

There let the pealing Organ blow,  
To the full voic’d Quire below,  
In Service high, and Anthems cleer,  
As may with sweetnes, through mine ear,

Dissolve me into extasies,  
And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes.  
And may at last my weary age  
Find out the peacefull hermitage,  
The Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell,  
Where I may sit and rightly spell,  
Of every Star that Heav'n doth shew,  
And every Herb that sips the dew;  
Till old experience do attain  
To something like Prophetic strain.  
These pleasures Melancholy give,  
And I with thee will choose to live. (161–76)

Remarkably, Pope satirized Milton as prophet. Barbara Lewalski has identified two substantive yet satirical engagements with *Il Penseroso* in Pope's Epistle to Burlington, noting that the Timon's villa section twice parodically evokes the prophetic implications of "And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes" (*Il Penseroso* 166): "Timon's tastelessly grandiose estate," Lewalski points out, "'brings all Brobdignag before your thought' (104), and the garishly painted ceiling in his chapel, with its sprawling saints on gilded clouds, will 'bring all Paradise before your eye' (148) in a synthetic baroque substitution for mystical vision" (36). Satire, like prophecy, enacts a corrective rewriting.

Leapor, in her own reworking of the Burlington Epistle, makes a key alternative substitution, revivifying the prophetic vision as far as the class dynamics of the poem will allow: servants, no matter how visionary, Leapor argues, are only allowed to see so far. Mira

experiences the more conventional prophetic insight of the Biblical, apocryphal, and serious (rather than parodic) Milton tradition: upward orientation, beauty beyond language rendered only as blinding light, and then a violent casting out. The verb “hurl’d” (“Crumble-Hall 107), denoting the prophetic expulsion, echoes another important Miltonic passage, Milton’s initial, summative description of Satan’s rebellion in *Paradise Lost*:

Him the Almighty Power  
Hurl’d headlong flaming from th’Ethereal Skie  
With hideous ruine and combustion down  
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,  
Who durst defie th’Omnipotent to Arms. (1.44–49)

It is tempting to analyze Leapor’s usage as a prefiguration of the Romantic embrace of Milton’s satan, which commenced at the end of the eighteenth-century. At present, however, it is sufficient to recognize the vatic configuration Leapor establishes: hidden knowledge is briefly revealed to the poet. Rather than the mysteries of divine operations, Leapor’s orientation is more mundane. Her “nether World” evokes both the landscape bordering the estate as well as the lower areas of the house—quite literally under the stairs, rather than among the stars, as access to the visionary vantage has been gained only by traversing the servants’ area of the house: “Back thro’ the Passage---down the Steps again; / Thro’ yon dark Room” 95–96). While it is always difficult to speak credibly about something that isn’t there, it can be pointed out that Leapor’s outsider orientation helps define an episteme of partial understanding: class remains a barrier to full knowledge.

Mira/Leapor's subsequent articulation of the prophetic vision is stark, which indicates something about the poem's political message. The culminating stanzas of "Crumble-House" formulate a kind of waste-land prophecy, which critics have used as a point of comparison between Pope and Leapor and as a focal point for the poem's ideological significance. In Dalporto's terms, for example, "the poet's prediction of a desolate, wasted landscape and a vanished way of life finish the poem with a darkly prophetic flourish" (241). The lines Dalporto is referencing constitute yet another major rewriting of Pope, himself a "harbinger of the kind of outcry made against landscape improvement later on in the century" (Dalporto 241). Pope's Epistle to Burlington ends with a Georgic vision of social improvement:

Yet hence the *Poor* are cloath'd, the *Hungry* fed;  
Health to himself, and to his Infants bread  
The Lab'rer bears: What his hard heart denies,  
His charitable Vanity supplies.  
Another age shall see the golden ear  
Imbrown the slope, and nod on the Parterre.  
Deep harvests bury all his pride has plann'd,  
And laughing *Ceres* re-assume the land. (167–74)

As Dalporto has pointed out, Pope's culminating image is a fundamentally visionary one: "Pope foresees a time when images of fertility and agricultural productivity will dominate the landscape once again. Leapor, however, forecasts an ecologically and socioeconomically grim future for the servants and the owner" (242). In other words, Leapor, drawing on tropes from an older romance tradition, prophesies an apocalyptic social collapse:

Yet (or the Muse for Vengeance calls in vain)

The injur'd Nymphs shall haunt the ravag'd Plain:  
Strange Sounds and Forms shall tease the gloomy Green;  
And Fairy-Elves by *Urs'la* shall be seen:  
Their new-built Parlour shall with Echoes ring:  
And in their Hall shall doleful Crickets sing. (179–84)

Part of the shift in tone, which can be classified as another instance of Leapor rewriting Pope, may be rather prosaically accounted for by the fact that Pope's Georgic Utopia had not come to pass. Enclosure was the law of the land.

Yet Leapor's rewriting also constitutes a rather drastic move away from the Miltonic orientation, with its classical and biblical rhetoric and rhythms, towards the older Spenserean attitude. In a sense, Leapor is doing what critics have recognized in the poetry of Collins, Akenside, and the Wartons: reclaiming and reemploying an older English poetic tradition. The political implications of this reclamation have been studied at length elsewhere (see the excellent overview essay by David Fairer in the *Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, itself a précis of Fairer's monograph on Spenser in the early eighteenth century); for the moment, it suffices to point out that the erasure of Milton from "Crumble-Hall" is completed by the move towards Spenser in the culminating apocalyptic image of the poem, a point I believe helps sharpen Chaden's claim that "The nymphs and dryads that Leapor imagines to live there stand outside society altogether and are visible only to another outsider: the poet. In any case, the prospect of self-centered landowners who intend to fell trees and destroy the natural landscape in favor of artificial slopes and a 'new-built Parlour' threaten the pastoral setting that conventionally nurtures both poetry and wildlife . . . she alternatively presents a retreat from social engagement, a retreat in this instance into a threatened grove" (44).

While it is tempting to interpret Leapor's erasure of Milton in negative terms—to ascribe to the erasure some fundamental dissatisfaction with or indeed critique of Milton—the reality is that Leapor simply cannot perform the Miltonic enterprise using Miltonic language and devices (nor did any of Milton's subsequent rewriters, either). Paradoxically, it is this absence of Milton that starkly signifies the Miltonic visionary enterprise Leapor enacts. Spenser (or at least Spenser's proto-Gothic romance language) has been collected, but Milton (or at least the Miltonic visionary orientation) is being experienced, opening up the precise theological dimensions of Leapor's country-house apocalypse, which informs a recalibration of the visionary mode.

The visionary mode, by definition, is an inherently religious utterance, in both the broadest and most narrow senses of the word. If we consider prophecy as primarily apocalyptic, dealing in the explication of highly esoteric knowledge, heretofore hidden before its (often divine) revelation to the poet-prophet, who is now charged with rendering the expression meaningful to an audience without access to the primary experience of the divine, then the mode is religious in the very broadest of terms, as a kind of gnostic initiation. And all the world's major religions have some association with revelation. When we consider that the English-language visionary mode, at least since Spenser, has been utilized primarily in contexts of doctrinal or denominational strife, then the mode is religious in a more narrowly Christian, cultural, and political sense as well.

The visionary poetics operating in "Crumble-Hall" can be situated within a rather precise socio-cultural context, namely the renewed rise of denominationally diverse nonconformity in the first half of the eighteenth century. At least one critic has examined the Leapor-Pope intertextuality with an eye towards religion, always a fecund context for Pope, given his

contemporaneously problematic Catholicism in a still-brutally Anglican Great Britain. Indeed, much of Chaden's examination hinges on the religious culture Pope and Leapor broadly, if not doctrinally, shared: "What Leapor sees in Pope is a man not only blessed with poetic talent and genius, but also one who shares her Christian values" (32). A closer examination of "On Mr. Pope's *Universal Prayer*" clarifies the Miltonic vaticism of "Crumble-Hall."

If Leapor's membership in the "line of vision" is predicated on her revisionary engagement with Pope, then Pope's own position in the Miltonic tradition requires some scrutiny. Put another way, to claim Leapor's place in the visionary tradition—even its eighteenth-century manifestation—requires some clarification of Pope's own engagement with Milton, the nature of which has generated a fair amount of scholarly debate.

The major question compelling the debate is which poetic tradition, wit or vision, Pope belongs to. The most judicious assessment seems to be Lewalski's, who sidesteps the wit/vision divide to focus on Pope's broader Miltonic interests, pointing out that Pope's canon of work posits a foundational question that is also "already implicit in Milton: What if the creative, ordering forces of God and man ceased to operate or to be effective? Recognition of that dimension may enhance our sense of the complexity of Milton's vision and his myth making" (46). Lewalski's portrait of Pope as Miltonist receives limiting clarification by Shawcross, another influential scholar who has closely examined Milton's legacy to the eighteenth century. Shawcross summarizes a venerable and widely held critical position when he claims the archetypal revelation that "is fundamental to prophecy" (of the kind Milton inherited, practiced, and in turn bequeathed the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries) was "an act of little interest to a Pope or a Johnson" (71). Or as Wittreich puts it, drawing on a criticism of Pope leveled first by William Blake and then clarified by A. S. P. Woodhouse, "*His was the cultural*



*inheritance of Sidney and Spenser*’—the words are spoken of Milton, but they imply what for a long time has been evident, that the tradition of poetry encompassing Donne, Dryden, and Pope (the so-called ‘line of wit’) is manifestly different from the visionary tradition including Sidney, Spenser, and Milton” (“A Poet” 97–98). For Wittreich and the others, wit is differentiated from vision by its biblical or revelatory structure: “The line of wit is one tradition of English poetry that exists alongside, sometimes even flowing into, another tradition, the line of vision, whose great exemplar is Milton and whose holding spool is the Bible—its prophecies and especially the Book of Revelation” (Wittreich, “A Poet,” 99). Unlike Shawcross, who rather vehemently excludes Pope from the visionary line, Wittreich leaves open the possibility of intersection, and we have to consider Pope, especially as Leapor read him, as a bisecting point.

In other words, establishing definitively either the line of wit or the line of vision can be tricky, because Pope seems to exist in both lines simultaneously. On the one hand, Pope himself both recognized and praised Milton’s visionary poetics, modeled on scriptural engagement: In his note at *Illiad* 8.88, Pope remarks that the “beautiful Allusion to the Sign of Libra in the Heavens [PL 4. 399–401] , and that noble Imagination of the Maker’s weighing the whole World at the Creation, and all the Events of it since; so correspondent at once to Philosophy, and to the Style of the Scriptures” (Note to *Illiad* VIII, 88; qtd. in Lewalski, 30). Moreover, Theodore E. D. Braun’s brief study of eighteenth-century French perceptions of Pope’s *Universal Prayer* as deistic provides additional evidence that Pope’s membership in the wit and vision traditions was an unresolved issue even in the eighteenth century: “French reactions to pope’s work prior to the publication of the Universal prayer were mixed. At first, the Jesuit *Journal de Trévoux* saw the Essay on Man . . . as sufficiently orthodox to merit official approbation, despite Pope’s apparent willingness to value reason more highly than revelation. The Jesuits did provide a caveat to their

approval, however: the work should not be read by the masses or by those of weak faith. but they soon reversed their position, condemning Pope's natural religion based on reason, believing it could lead only to indifference or worse" (424). Pope's poetics, like his doctrines, seems multivalent and heterodox.

I should clarify, then, how Pope bisects the line of vision, before explicating a rather oblique yet notable prophetic moment in Pope's *The Universal Prayer*, which Leapor prophetically (and politically) explicates in "On Mr. Pope's Universal Prayer." The intersection—or to recycle Wittreich's phrase, the "flowing into"—is best approached through the Platonic framework that many critics, including Shawcross, use to define the visionary tradition. "While most attention has been paid," Shawcross writes, "to an 'Aristotelian' principle of imitation that develops the line of wit, methodizing but praising variation as well, an unstinted undercurrent of 'Platonic' 'truth' persists to establish a line of vision. The 'Platonic' poet becomes a copyist (a quite different concept from that of being an imitator) of the poet's own vision. The employment of the Bible is a clear demarcation between these antithetic poets, the one reproducing, for example, event or character, the other interpreting the revelation in the event or character"—and it is this revelatory, interpretive, Platonic poetics that Shawcross accuses Pope of lacking (71). Yet to Malcolm Kelsall, author of a seminal monograph on eighteenth-century country house poetry, the same explicatory, critical orientation that Shawcross misses in Pope, actually defines Pope's pastoral poetics, especially in the estate poems: there is, Kelsall argues, "an element of visionary radicalism in Pope's iconology which transcends the limitations of the historical moment" (n.p.) that exhibits decidedly Platonic characteristics: "The movement of Pope's imagination is from the historical . . . to the archetype . . . to an implied visionary ideal (the good, which is realized through the imagination). Our

imperfect world is a realm of shadows, but beyond is the realm of light—to adopt a Platonic image. The third Earl of Shaftesbury is the authoritative voice on Platonism and the landscape in Pope’s lifetime, but Pope’s English poetic forefathers, Milton and Spenser, are Platonists also: one the tragic poet of paradise lost, the other the creator of a chivalric order which exists only in faerie land, while this world is prey to ineluctable mutability” (n.p.). Kelsall’s analysis establishes one key interpretive rewriting of the Bible in Pope’s second satire. “The Universal Prayer” marks another example of that same prophetic poetics—with significant Miltonic overtones.

The dominating image in the early part of “The Universal Prayer” is one of blindness. The poem is a hymnic address to the godhead, employing a deceptive lyrical simplicity (more characteristic of the wit poets) that is as un-Miltonic in tone as it is Miltonic in orientation:

Thou Great First Cause, least understood!

Who all my Sense confin’d

To know but this,—that Thou art Good,

And that my self am blind:

Yet gave me, in this dark Estate,

To see the Good from Ill;

And binding Nature fast in Fate,

Left free the Human Will.

What Conscience dictates to be done,

Or warns me not to doe,

This, teach me more than Hell to shun,  
That, more than Heav'n pursue. (5–16)

This section of “Universal Prayer” articulates a number of thematic considerations closely associated with Milton: free will (“sufficient to have stood but free to fall” [*PL* 3.99]), liberty of conscience (“Christian Liberty means that Christ our liberator Frees us from the slavery of sin and thus from the rule of the law and of men, as if we were emancipated slaves. He does this so that, being made sons instead of servants and grown men instead of boys, we may serve God in charity through the guidance of the spirit of truth” [*De Doctrina Christiana*]), and prophetic sight, enhanced by blindness (“thee I revisit safe, / And feel thy sovran vital Lamp; but thou / Revisit'st not these eyes, that rowle in vain / To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn” (*PL* 3.21–24). Among eighteenth-century Miltonists, Milton's physical blindness underwrote a Platonic orientation: Citing Walter Pator, John Walter Good has argued that “the Platonists derived mysticism ‘from the act of shutting the eyes, that one may see the more inwardly.’ Such certainly was thought in the Eighteenth Century to have been the effect of Milton's Blindness: he was enabled thereby to see the invisible things of the spiritual world . . . This idea of a compensative inner illumination continued even into the Nineteenth Century” (253–54). It is this Platonic “compensative inner illumination” (Good 254) that gives Pope's “Universal Prayer” its vatic structure.

If Miltonic blindness structures the poem, its prophetic utterance stems from Pope's interpretive rewriting of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6), a seminal Christian touchstone that transcends doctrinal or even denominational divisions. And it is this latter point that defines the poem's reformatory or revisionary purpose: rewriting the Lord's Prayer as a Universal—that is non-denominationally Christian—creed.

Teach me to feel another's Woe;  
To hide the Fault I see;  
That Mercy I to others show,  
That Mercy show to me.

Mean tho' I am, not wholly so  
Since quicken'd by thy Breath,  
O lead me wheresoe'er I go,  
Thro' this day's Life, or Death:

This day, be Bread and Peace my Lot;  
All else beneath the Sun,  
Thou know'st if best bestow'd, or not;  
And let Thy Will be done.

To Thee, whose Temple is all Space,  
Whose Altar, Earth, Sea, Skies;  
One Chorus let all Being raise!  
All Nature's Incence rise! (37–52)

With its focus on empathetic, benevolent piety, Pope's recasting of Matthew 6:9–13 as the "Universal" prayer addresses the politically contentious nature of British nonconformity in the early eighteenth century.

And Leapor in turn engaged with Pope's rewriting: "*The Universal Prayer* is the only poem of Pope's that Leapor explicitly mentions by name in her own poetry. A personal article of faith all-embracing in its sense of a universal deity and free of allusions to particular people or events, 'On Mr. Pope's *Universal Prayer*' is the poem with the most direct connection to the circumstances of Leapor's life and the internal struggles she faces daily" (Chalden 33). The religious association Leapor more explicitly constructs in "On Mr. Pope's *Universal Prayer*" in a sense renders the Catholic Pope acceptable to dissenting protestant evangelicals, a point Chaden emphasizes: "What impresses [Leapor] most about Pope's (poem is not simply the ease with which his 'Numbers flow' but the purity of his sentiments, a purity more striking to her for the way it stands in the face of any criticism that he, as a Catholic, might receive from the Protestant 'Enthusiasts' to whom she directs these lines (33). In "On Mr. Pope's *Universal Prayer*," Pope's new Matthew is yet again transformed by Leapor's evangelical reinterpretation—a critical rewriting that satisfies Wittreich's—and even Shawcross's—definition of the line of vision tradition:

Ye careless Ones, who never thought before,  
Read this grand Verse, then tremble and adore:  
Let stern Enthusiasts here be taught to know,  
'Tis from the Heart true Piety must flow:  
Here Hope, Content, and smiling Mercy shine;  
And breathe celestial through the speaking Line:  
From the still Mind its guilty Passions roll,  
And dawning Grace awakes the servent Soul.

Let angry Zealots quarrel for a Name,  
The good, the just, the virtuous are the same:  
Grace to no Sect, nor Virtue is confin'd;  
They blend with all, and spread amongst the kind;  
And the pure Flame that warms the pious Breast:  
Those cannot merit who condemn the rest. (11–24)

Leapor emphasizes the sectarian discord of British Christianity by reinterpreting Pope's own Miltonic reworking, from the point of view of the recusant Catholic (or at least Catholic-influenced worldview), of sect-less Christianity. And as Chalden points out, Leapor adds an additional layer of revision, dealing with class politics: "In this call for religious tolerance, Leapor outlines the qualities that she considers universal marks of virtue—hope, contentment, mercy, justice, piety—that is, the values of Christian humanism. And while her specific focus here is the way these qualities 'spread amongst' religious sects, elsewhere she extends her argument across class lines" (34). The basic vatic engagement on display in "On Mr. Pope's Universal Prayer" ought to reinvigorate our examination of "Crumble-Hall," one of the places where Leapor's "grand argument" (PL) "extends . . . across class lines" (Chalden 34).

This complexity suggests the degree to which the prophetic orientation, and the poetic tradition around it, is a fundamentally religious poetic and is likewise political. Consider how Wittreich defines the line of vision specifically, and biblical prophecy more generally, as a corrective, re-visionary enterprise. In its purely poetic sense, to apply a slightly different model (Harold Bloom's), the vatic tradition (or "visionary company") is about creative misreadings. In any event, the result is the same: reform. In Britain in the eighteenth century, corrective, reform-minded rhetoric was applied in a number of different zones or spheres of public discourse, poetry

being one of those spheres. And whatever other functions religious poetry performed, the utterance was, like all religious eighteenth-century expressions or behaviors, inherently, primarily political. In other words, religion was a contested public space, and poetry—especially visionary poetry—engaged poet and audience civically as well as spiritually.

If the influential majority of Leapor's modern critics have politicized her work, they have done so very much under the auspices of close reading. Leapor's class-conscious and class-minded poetics, which inform the principle corrective motivation of "Crumble-Hall"'s prophetic engagement with Pope and the country-house tradition, drive her comprehensive artistic agenda as well, a point Landry (and by implication those critics, like Greene and Griffin, who debate Landry's conclusions) underscore with their own interpretive frameworks. If the class politics in the poems have driven analogously politicized research and pedagogical agendas among Leapor's major recent critics, the overlaying of the visionary poetics framework atop the Marxist and Feminist lenses already being used to explicate Leapor helps open up another aspect of Leapor's radical intervention into British culture: her dissent.

In order to set the stage for a fuller exploration of Leapor's visionary dissent—or rather, the way Leapor's religious, and therefore political, affiliations drive her corrective poetics—it can be helpful to more definitively establish Leapor's radical ethos. First, a caveat: one of the weaknesses of the first wave of recovery criticism, undertaken in the 1990s by Marxist and Feminist scholars, was the parochial yet I believe progressively-intentioned tendency to view women and working-class poets as inherently, unproblematically radical just because they belonged minority social groups. Leapor isn't radical because she was a working-class woman poet; rather, Leapor was radical because she subscribed to and in turn professed radical ideas.



In this context, it is helpful to recall Rumbold's analysis of "Crumble-Hall" as potentially, and at times actually, dissident. Rumbold's consideration of the circumstantial context surrounding the publication of "Crumble-Hall" posits a theory of dissident poetics under development. Identifying "Crumble-Hall" as a serious revision of the country house (or more precisely the "estate poems") tradition, Rumbold singles out what I am calling the prophetic moment in the poem as "a bizarre disruption, figuring a complex set of tensions between rootedness and aspiration" that constitutes "a radical challenge to the assumptions on which country house poems had usually been based. For Leapor is not an appreciative visitor or recipient of patronage intent on celebrating the owner through an unfolding of the values discerned in his management of the property, but a woman who has been dismissed from the post of kitchenmaid in the house she takes for her model—and dismissed, moreover, for writing poetry . . . by choosing not to allude to her dismissal or her hopes of literary independence in 'Crumble Hall' Leapor is also experimenting with a stance of detachment which might entitle her to a public voice, a dissent superior to the embarrassments of personal circumstance" (63–64). Rumbold's underscoring of the reason for dismissal means that the poem, at least obliquely, is as much about writing poetry as it is about master-domestic servant-labor relations. This poetry-about-writing-poetry inscription is as well a hallmark of the visionary tradition as Wittreich defines it, but in Leapor's own self-assessment poetry is something transgressive: "Sad Mira vows to quit the darling Crime" ("Crumble-Hall" 5). This transgressive quality to the writing of poetry, which equally characterizes the prophetic stance, is principally dissident—and therefore an organic rhetorical outlet for religious dissent.

The bulk of Leapor's religious poetry also belongs to the biblical paraphrase subgenre, a tradition with close ties to radical dissent. For Backscheider, Leapor uses narrative religious

poetry in subversive ways (156): “Mary Leapor’s metrical tales and paraphrases have unusual range and also demonstrate the century’s decided taste for Old Testament subjects with their raw passions and tense situations embedded in personal and political narratives. Among Leapor’s are *David’s Complaint*, *ii Samuel*, *Chap. 1*; *The Death of Abel*; *Job’s Curse and his Appeal*; and *The Tale of Cuchi. From 2 Samuel*, *chap. xviii*. She selected dramatic exchanges and embroidered them, often with digressive, virtuoso displays of various kinds of poetry” (156). Backscheider’s observations set the stage for a consideration of biblical paraphrase as corrective rewriting, which would mean that Leapor (like Pope before her in *The Universal Prayer*) extends visionary poetics beyond the strict prophecy genre (or mode) Wittreich defines.

We have already seen, in the Rowe chapter, that as a literary genre, biblical paraphrase is important to our broader understanding of British women poets. Here, it suffices to note that women writers had been using the Biblical paraphrase genre since at least the mid-sixteenth century, constituting a tradition that one critic traces back to the prayer book of Elizabeth Tyrwhit, composed around 1550 (Felch 150): “Tyrwhit and many of the women who followed her . . . employed another scripturally grounded genre—the Biblical paraphrase, a genre that highlighted authorial agency by expanding a single biblical text into didactic, theological, or even political speech” (Felch 152–53). It is this tradition that Donna Landry has in mind when she identifies biblical paraphrase as “the most hospitable form in which eighteenth-century women poets could approach questions of urgent philosophical and political importance” (189). Far from a staid genre, biblical paraphrase represents some of the most radical poetic compositions of the eighteenth century. “These narrative poems could take daringly personal and subversive turns,” Backscheider claims, citing as evidence Elizabeth Hand’s *Death of Amnon* (158).

More specifically, the biblical paraphrase genre is deeply rooted in British dissent. Felch characterizes the biblical paraphrase genre in political terms: “Thus, paraphrase provided a genre for sixteenth-century writers that allowed scripture to be married to an expansive literary and didactic framework. When carried over into the psalms, such paraphrases produced a prayer genre that was catechetical, devotional, and literarily complex. Broadly speaking, paraphrase helped to validate for intensely devout Protestants the ongoing creation of literary works. Within the bounds of religious writing, paraphrase provided an opportunity for imaginative writing, and it did so by recourse to highly developed rhetorical and literary skills” (157). Bear in mind that Catechism in the 1550s (or thereabout) was an intensely political issue.

It would seem, then, that by the time Leapor employed it the genre had retained its subversive authority and radical connotations, thanks in part to Christopher Smart. As Knight and Marsh point out, Smart’s “*Song to David* (1763) and the posthumously published *Jubilate Agno* (1758–63; 1939) were both regarded as ostensible proof of his mental illness. Yet the two poems offer revolutionary paraphrases of Scripture, offering a dissenting alternative to the standard Anglican liturgy and making implicit criticism of self-regarding, effusive meditations such as [Edward Young’s] *Night Thoughts*” (28). And the genre would advance a dissenting agenda after Leapor’s time as well. Knight and Mason, following E. P. Thompson’s characterization of Blake as arch-dissenter (“Blake read almost everything he engaged with defiantly, and this is what marks him as a Dissenter” [43]), claim that Blake’s entire canon “endlessly interprets and paraphrases Scripture” (43), a critical observation that allows us some opening to begin thinking of the biblical paraphrase genre in terms of the visionary tradition Wittreich maps out—Blake is, after all, Milton’s most “defiant” (to recast Knight and Mason’s term) rewriter. And Sarah Houghton-Walker’s study of John Clare’s religion includes an

important, albeit speculative comment on the radical nature of Biblical paraphrase: “There are . . . historical reasons why Clare might have been attracted to the enterprise . . . Firstly, there is the tradition of biblical translation as an historically radical act, as the representative fates of Wyclif and Tyndale attest . . . Secondly, in paraphrasing the Bible, Clare is staking a claim to literary accomplishment through contemporary assumption of scriptural moral and spiritual superiority over classical works of literature . . . Moreover, Clare’s paraphrasing marks, at least temporarily, a renunciation of poetry preoccupied with recording a specific natural world” with an eye towards “The Lowthian approach to Hebrew poetry” (121-122). It is worth recalling here that Bishop Lowth is a major theorist behind Wittreich’s VP framework (Milton himself was a great paraphraser of scripture, the poetics of which certainly form his longer prophetic articulations).

Leapor’s paraphrases seem not to yield any particular doctrinal or sectarian, denominational identity. It would seem to be pressing the case a bit too far to claim, as I would have liked, that Leapor understood the vatic or prophetic act to be an instrument for direct political engagement—as it would later be for Barbauld. The seemingly apolitical nature of the paraphrase, if we except the inherently transgressive fact of their having been created in the first place, may point to the fact that poetry, regardless of its genre or modal inscription, was not understood as substitute or stand in for other kinds of political behavior, which dissenters, women, and laborers were barred from participating in. Yet it would likewise be a mistake to suggest that Leapor was not interested in or was ignorant of the politics of her day. If individual poems, including the biblical paraphrases, seem not to easily yield political views, the aggregate of her canon certainly does, even beyond the class politics that has heretofore received the lion’s share of the critical attention paid to Leapor. One of the important, occasional poems treating politics directly is “*Cicely, Joan, and Deborah, an Eclogue upon hearing of the Defeat of the*

Rebels at *Culloden*.” In this poem, three laboring-class women drink beer to celebrate the defeat of the Jacobite uprising by the Duke of Cumberland at Culloden. It is tempting to read the biblical paraphrases against this anti-Jacobite satire, which does yield some insights into the precise nature of politics of Leapor’s visionary poetics.

Leapor’s interest in the 1745 Rebellion—premised on the fact that “*Cicely, Joan, and Deborah*, an Eclogue upon hearing of the Defeat of the Rebels at *Culloden*” is one of the only overtly occasional poems in either volume of *Poems Upon Several Occasions*. This choice of subject is particularly worth noting, given the fact that Leapor’s frequent model Pope was, fairly or not, associated with the Jacobite moment: “Pope’s religious and political affiliations never let him alone: in January 1723 his edition of John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham’s *Works* was published and seized by the Government on suspicion of Jacobitism” (Lawler para. 5).

One explanation of the lack of overt contemporary political referents (and references) in the biblical paraphrases may be the ongoing tension between escape and retreat, between engagement and disengagement, that so marks the British pastoral mode. The country-house genre, like the broader pastoral mode that encompasses it, creates a fundamental tension between engagement and retreat. Kelsall, analyzing Pope’s inscription to the Nathaniel Parr engraving of the Twickenham villa (1735), argues that retirement themes encode or conceal political and psychological complexity: “The obvious emphasis is on retirement from ‘the World’ (meaning the social, political, and business world of the new Rome, London); on hospitality and friendship (without regard to wealth or status); and on the self-sufficient and simple (non-luxurious) productivity of the garden/estate . . . rather than the way of the world of Rome/London . . . These are standard classical motifs and were unexceptional commonplaces of ‘villa culture’(6) . . . Although Pope began with an artisan’s dwelling, nonetheless the construction of a four-story

villa (with five acres of ground) was neither cheap nor small, then or now. Considered in abstract, philosophical terms, Pope is alluding to the philosophical ‘mean’ between, for instance, the contemporary grandiloquence of Marlborough’s Blenheim Palace or Walpole’s Houghton Hall, and the poverty of the wind-chilled attic of a Grub Street hack. But there is a politics to that ‘mean’” (np).

Kelsall’s assessment of the pastoral ideology in Pope is part of a larger argument supporting an interpretation of Pope as culturally radical. Elsewhere, Kelsall argues “It may seem tendentious to link Pope to the American Declaration of 4 July 1776, but the country-house gentry of the American revolution (men like George Washington of Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson of Monticello) drew inspiration from the discourse of the English opposition to the corruption, tending to ‘tyranny’, of the monarcho-aristocratical system of the Hanoverian regime. Pope was the major poetic voice of that opposition” (n.p.) Kelsall pushes the case even further: “If the Epistle to Burlington had been written in the 1790s, one would call Timon’s villa (or Cotta’s inhospitable ‘hall’ in Bathurst) examples of the ancien régime. Even Pope’s friendship with the great might not have protected him from prosecution for the ‘Jacobinical’ implications of his attack on the powers that were. The ‘radical’ and the dangerously ‘constructive tendency’ of the satire would be apparent” (n.p.).

Despite this characterization of Pope’s political affiliations and ideological sympathies, the religious politics seem harder to pin down, a conclusion that is somewhat easily drawn from ongoing critical disagreements about Pope’s “true” religious thinking—at one time or another Pope has been labeled a deist, a proponent of natural religion, a Catholic, and a freethinker. Settling that point is not my concern here: rather, the controversy is enough to suggest that Pope’s thinking about poetry as an instrument for political engagement and reform, a point later

dissenters would embrace (see Daniel White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) is fairly indeterminate. In fact, a strong case has been made about Pope fully retreating from radical religious politics, which I believe opens up a new way of reading the visionary orientation of Leapor's "Crumble-Hall"—contextualized against Leapor's rewriting of key parts of *the Essay on Man* in her biblical paraphrase, "The Third Chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon. From the First to the Sixth Verse."

Leapor's paraphrase of the Wisdom of Solomon is quite remarkable, given the extracannonical nature of that book among orthodox British Protestants. Her choice makes more sense, however, when we recall that the principle subject matter of The Wisdom of Solomon's third chapter, namely the immortality of the soul, is as well a major issue in Epistle I of *The Essay on Man*:

Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar;  
Wait the great teacher, Death, and God adore!  
What future bliss, he gives not thee to know,  
But gives that Hope to be thy blessing now.  
Hope springs eternal in the human breast;  
Man never is, but always to be blest;  
The soul uneasy, and confin'd at home,  
Rests, and expatiates, in a life to come. (87–94)

Denied access to revealed knowledge, human beings behave morally under the influence of desire—desire for immortality and posthumous revelation. In this case, death—rather than the vatic poet—rends aside the veil; death is the only true prophet, and the poet is only speculating.

Yet the poet can, it would seem, visualize the condition or the state of the soul after death, in essence dramatizing what is otherwise mysterious and ineffable.

Leapor performs such a dramatization on the first 6 verses of Wisdom 3. In the rather staid language of the Authorized version, the passage, typical of the wisdom literature tradition, depicts human suffering as an important prerequisite to eternal life:

BUT the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, And their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality. And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them, and found them worthy for himself. As gold in the furnace hath he tried them, and received them as a burnt offering. (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1–5)

Leapor gives these lines the full Miltonic visionary treatment:

And the blest Shades for whom you vainly mourn,  
To these dim Regions wou'd no more return,  
Wrap'd in bright Visions they no Ills endure,  
From Sin, from Danger, and from Death secure:  
'Tis past. The parting Struggles are no more,  
They now are landed on the blissful Shore,  
Where no pale Fears nor sullen Sorrows dwell,  
But Joys beyond what mortal Tongues can tell?  
Where smiling Hope for ever blooms around,  
And growing Pleasures that shall know no Bound. (5–14)



Leapor's paraphrase ends with another visionary image, of the departed soul in the presence of the godhead:

From that great Being they shall find their Pay,  
Who blest the rising and the closing Day.  
When the pure Spirit from its Prison flies,  
How joy the Seraphs in their brighter Skies:  
Around their Guest the shining Guards attend,  
And heav'nly Harps with heav'nly Voices blend. (29–34)

It would seem that Leapor's paraphrase engages in a visionary or prophetic revision of a key passage in Pope's *Essay*, in a sense clarifying the heterodox nature of Pope's religious thinking. Here Sarah Ellen Zweig's important analysis of Pope in the context of British freethinking can usefully be brought to bear: "Pope had no mission to change the world, despite his evident distaste for much of institutional religion . . . In response to Caryl's warnings that divines had objected to hints of heterodoxy in [Essay on Criticism], Pope expresses his willingness . . . to revise the offensive element in the interests of 'the quiet of mankind.' And though Pope went on again to eschew revealed religion in favor of natural religion in *An Essay on Man*, the fraught reception of the poem motivated his abandonment, on prudential grounds, of the larger, more ambitious, and more radical 'Ethic Epistles,' of which *An Essay on Man* was to form a part" (148–49). In a sense, Leapor reinvests the Miltonic energies Pope's *Epistle* seems to have repressed by disengaging from religious politics—a kind of philosophical mimic of the pastoral retreat at least partially enacted in the *Epistle to Burlington*. For Leapor, the poet still "Soars above t' Aonian mount" rather than dwelling, as Pope seems to, in the realm of natural religion, which certainly may be more rational but is arguably less in need of prophetic investment.

This tension plays itself out in the ending of “Crumble-Hall,” a poem from which Leapor has erased an important Miltonic reference only to engage in a powerfully Miltonic (and apocalyptic) ending. Mira’s tour through the estate, as we have seen, had its high Miltonic visionary moment interrupted or intruded upon by domestic, laboring realities—the ultimate, as it were, mundanities shutting off the celestial vision Mira nearly achieves. Yet in a staggeringly inventive turn, Leapor performs a second interruption of the domestic service portion of the poem, reintroducing the vatic orientation:

But, hark! what Scream the wond’ring Ear invades!  
The Dryads howling for their threaten’d Shades:  
Round the dear Grove each Nymph distracted flies  
(Tho’ not discover’d but with Poet’s Eyes): (165–68)

The parenthetical aside recalls the vatic performance in the biblical paraphrase, but here, instead of setting up a celestial, paradisiacal audience with the godhead, we get a prophetic wasteland depiction (an interesting prefiguration of T. S. Eliot):

Shall these ignobly from their Roots be torn,  
And perish shameful, as the abject Thorn;  
While the slow Carr bears off their aged Limbs,  
To clear the Way for Slopes, and modern Whims;  
Where banish’d Nature leaves a barren Gloom,  
And aukward Art supplies the vacant Room?  
Yet (or the Muse for Vengeance calls in vain)  
The injur’d Nymphs shall haunt the ravag’d Plain:  
Strange Sounds and Forms shall tease the gloomy Green;

And Fairy-Elves by Urs'la shall be seen:  
Their new-built Parlour shall with Echoes ring:  
And in their Hall shall doleful Crickets sing.  
Then cease, Diracto , stay thy desp'rate Hand;  
And let the Grove, if not the Parlour, stand. (174–86)

Building upon Chaden's reading, which conclusively positions Leapor's vision in opposition to Pope's (44-45), we can only speculate about where Leapor's precise political engagement was heading. Yet the visionary poetics of "Crumble-Hall" suggest that, unlike Pope, Leapor—if given the opportunity and the time to do so, without having to worry about earning a living—would have chosen a more Miltonic path than the one Pope trod. As the erasure shows, Leapor saw herself as capable of being equal to, rather than remaining indebted to, Milton's radical visionary poetics.

#### Chapter Four: Barbauld's "Corsica" and the Dissenting Visionary Tradition

To this point, I have demonstrated how Barker, Rowe, and Leapor produced major poetic interlocutions engaging the British prophetic tradition through Milton. It is possible, then, to view Anna Barbauld's work as the culmination of a century's worth of visionary poetics by nonconformist women. Considering Barbauld as a culminating point is, I admit, somewhat arbitrary and critically artificial. Throughout this dissertation, I have engaged in my own critical interlocation with Wittreich's critical model, which for the sake of explication renders poets as points on a line, thereby facilitating the drawing of allusive, revisionary connections. To suggest that Barbauld culminates a segment of that line is a limited but useful way of highlighting her cultural liminality, bridging one literary era, the eighteenth century, with another, the Romantic period. The terms we use for those eras are not parallel, and I will exert no effort to make them so here. The critical model I have adopted and adapted requires me to use the terms of the discourse I am engaging, in order to suggest that the visions of Barker, Rowe, and Leapor influenced, either directly or indirectly, Barbauld's poetical figurations of political reform.

Unlike Barker, Rowe, or Leapor, Barbauld has received considerable attention from scholars: she is the subject of a major critical biography and the focus of several important monographs. It is not surprising that any consideration of Barbauld and Milton must confront a richer, largely feminist critical history, which in its recent phase has been skeptical of the kind of comparison I am undertaking in this chapter, where among other considerations I identify and analyze the presence of Milton in Barbauld's "Corsica." This identification is risky, as Paula R. Feldman points out: "Hermeneutically, ['Corsica'] speaks to two audiences at once. To one . . . it speaks the language of Milton ('the mind is its own place') and thus situates Barbauld in a well-defined male tradition of ethical-political discourse. To the other, readers of Mary Astell or

Lady Chudleigh, it speaks the language of early feminist quietism . . . Thus, Barbauld smuggles her personal themes into these poems under the label of a public discourse. To the reader of ‘Corsica’ who . . . is prepared only to hear Milton, there will seem to be no woman in the poem. (*Romantic Women Writers* 122-23). Yet, as she is in Barker’s, Rowe’s, and Leapor’s prophetic verse, the “woman in [Barbauld’s] poem” is herself a strong reader—that is to say, a corrective reviser—of Milton. Robert W. Jones analyzes Barbauld in just that way, as a “careful and intelligent” responder to Milton, strategically revising earlier eighteenth-century Miltonic misreadings by the likes of Thomas Warton and Samuel Johnson to advance a liberal dissenting project (119–20). To do so, however, Jones admits situating Barbauld “within what is generally assumed to be the male tradition of liberal or patriotic writing in the 1770s” (120). The critic who speaks about Barbauld as a woman practicing male poetics or engaging in masculine discourses seemingly cannot but elide if not deny outright the very woman’s voice that such feminist decoders as Feldman have gone to great lengths to recover. Yet the presence of Milton in “Corsica” is inescapable. As my earlier chapters demonstrate, shifting the focus to visionary poetics can responsibly account for that presence without damaging Barbauld’s standing as a woman poet.

Wittreich’s later criticism, much of it feminist in its theoretical orientation, affords a useful model for this kind of comparative reading. Wittreich has sufficiently re-historicized Milton in a way that allows us to call Barbauld “Miltonic” without eliding or denying her female voice, underscoring a crucial shift in literary historiography from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries: “[t]he time has passed when women could and would enlist Milton as a rebel in their cause. . . . [present-day] apprehension of *Paradise Lost* as a principle document of and powerful sanction for patriarchal culture is simply different from what it was in Milton’s century

and in the eighteenth and early nineteenth it had been” (*Feminist Milton* xi-xii). In other words, Miltonic interlocutions in poems like “Corsica” were radical vocalizations at the time of their composition and initial reception. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Milton’s own radical voice was largely elided or denied outright by dominant British literary discourses, a point underscored by the radical Miltonism of writers like Barker, Rowe, Leapor—and Barbauld. If recent feminist critics have done much to recover “the woman in the poem,” Wittreich reminds us that many of those recovered women were themselves engaged in an analogous project to recover and rewrite Milton (*Feminist Milton* xv).

Rather than view Barbauld’s gender as the primary source of her radicalism, which presupposes something extraordinary about women poets and thus reinforces an essentially condescending rendition of literary history, I prefer to locate the more precise cultural and ideological roots of her radical intervention. To do so, the poem’s religious contexts need to be clarified: Barbauld’s strong dissenting principles, steeped in Presbyterian and Unitarian thought, form the basis of the eighteenth century’s first large-scale, systematic revision of Milton (predating William Blake’s), which Barbauld achieves by tempering the militancy, yet not the zealotry, of Milton’s apocalyptic prophecies.

A four-line verse paragraph in the salve tradition opens the poem, an address to Corsica characterizing that nation as a site resisting mutability:

HAIL generous CORSICA! unconquer’d isle!

The fort of freedom; that amidst the waves

Stands like a rock of adamant, and dares

The wildest fury of the beating storm. (1)

Time, represented as weather (more specifically as the violently erosive quality of precipitation) and as oceanic tides, another agent of erosion, follows conventional paradigms. Corsica's adamant resistance to the steady breaking down of earth by water is presented in such a way as to symbolize an ideal of constitutional nationhood immune to the eroding pressures of history. In this particular instance the metaphor is wholly ironic, for the Corsica being described in such highly atemporal terms is a state that has dramatically failed to resist historical pressures—which Barbauld underscores by concretizing the year 1769 in the poem's subtitle.

The new corrected edition of Barbauld's *Poems* (1792), published one year before the onset of the Reign of Terror in revolutionary France, confronted anew millennial anxieties that mark much British literature of the later eighteenth century. Stuart Andrews's survey of British periodical literature of the French Revolutionary period demonstrates the extent to which "Millennialist prophecies were . . . given fresh currency by events in France" (179), concluding that "The frequent effectiveness of millennialist rhetoric in the hands of Jacobin and anti-Jacobin alike, should not mislead us into thinking that it was merely a rhetorical device – even when used by the poets" (191). Barbauld's 1792 volume significantly yet subtly revises a collection of poems first published in 1773, another crisis moment of revolutionary significance, this one involving America. The nineteen years separating the first edition and the new corrected edition (other additions appeared in the intervening years, including lesser revisions) were a politically volatile period, especially for dissenters. In a way, the publication of the new corrected edition participated in a larger social debate about whether revolution could be a viable (and even virtuous) instrument of domestic reform, as it had been internationally in the American colonies and in France.

All editions of *Poems* open with “Corsica,” an epic treatment of the declaration of Corsican independence from Genoa in 1755 and the resulting guerrilla war with France, led by Pasquale Paoli, one of the revolutionary period’s opening salvos. Barbauld ascribes the date 1769 to the poem, which provisionally aligns the composition of “Corsica” with Paoli’s defeat at Ponte Novu and his subsequent flight to Britain. In the 1773 edition, the dating of the poem occurs by means of a footnote affixed to the title: “Written in the year 1769”. Yet in the 1792 corrected edition, Barbauld eliminates the footnote, giving the date of composition a new position and new prominence by making it the poem’s subtitle. The move also serves to foreground a particularly acute strain of apocalypticism in “Corsica”—a tributary stream of the larger currents of apocalyptic thought and millennial anxiety rampant in the late eighteenth century, which Jack Fruchtman, Jr, labels “republican millennialism”: “Like their Whig predecessors of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Price and Priestley believed that English government was infected with corruption where unequal representation, coupled with the overpowering influence of the crown, had led to the establishment of government by a few who had reduced the many to dependance . . . As two millennialists deeply immersed in scriptural prophecy, they understood the future course of history and God’s control of that history beyond the realm of mortal men” (153–54). This context contributes to a radical explication of the poem: “Corsica” is subtly transformed from a poem inspired by a revolutionary action into a poem about the defeat—or, to adopt apocalyptic terms, the end—of that same revolution. If the declaration of Corsican independence signaled to the romantic imagination the beginning of transformative revolutionary possibility, its failure, Barbauld purports, signals the end times of that same romantic impulse, which changes the way time functions in the salve.



Subsequent examinations of eschatology, the branch of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final condition of the human soul, can be of some use in clarifying the apocalyptic vision. For example, the World War Two-era Jewish philosopher Jacob Taubes's eschatological definition of history, read back upon Barbauld, helps to explain the sense of time Barbauld evokes in the "Corsica" address. Taubes understands time and history as mutually defining terms: "The course of history is borne away in time....The nature of time is summed up by its irreversible unidirectionality....From a geometrical point of view, time runs in a straight line in one direction....The direction of this straight line is irreversible. This unidirectionality is common to both life and time. Unidirectionality and irreversibility are fundamental to their meaning. The purpose of this unidirectionality lies in the direction itself. The direction is always toward an end; otherwise, it would be directionless. The end is essentially Eschaton" (3–4). As a recent study of Taubes's eschatology argues, many twentieth-century scholars, in the aftermath of World War Two, went looking for the roots of "the secularization of eschatology" (Styfhals 192) in the same tradition that Barbauld, through Milton, engages: the apocalypticism of Joachim of Fiore. That Barbauld fixes "Corsica" in time marks the poem as a literary analogue to Taubes's understanding of history as fundamentally eschatological. In other words, Barbauld situates Corsica within apocalyptic time, the unfolding of history toward an appointed and inevitable end. And so the attribution of an eternal nature—Corsica "Stands like a rock of adamant, and dares/ The wildest fury of the beating storm" (1)—to a geographical space otherwise fixed in an eschatological timeline sets up the primary apocalyptic tension of the poem.

The apocalyptic address that opens "Corsica" also establishes Barbauld's eschatological orientation as literary, rather than exclusively scriptural or theological, by evoking *Paradise*

*Lost*. The “Corsica” address’s temporal metaphor, key to understanding Barbauld’s initial apocalypticism, depends upon the image of the rock, a terrestrial substance subject to the mutability of time, which, as noted above, Barbauld figures as ocean and storms. More specifically, Corsica is “a rock of adamant.” The first edition of Johnson’s dictionary (1756) lists three definitions for *adamant*, the first of which reflects Barbauld’s usage: “A stone of impenetrable hardness.” Johnson also records two adjectival forms of the word, *adamantean* and *adamantine*; the former is supported by a reference to Milton, suggesting the degree to which *adamant* sounded particularly Miltonic overtones by the mid-eighteenth century (Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 1 of 2 [London, 1756]). Milton’s Satan was

Hurld headlong flaming from th’ Ethereal Skie

With hideous ruin and combustion down

To bottomless perdition, there to dwell

In *Adamantine* Chains and penal Fire. (*PL* 1.45-48; emphasis added)

Whether by direct allusion or merely through the accretion of Miltonic meaning to the word *adamant*, Barbauld’s image of Corsica as immutable rock, standing outside any linear unfolding of time and history, nevertheless contradicts itself, evoking instead the master narrative of British literary apocalypse and bringing to mind the initiating event of Christian eschatology, the fall of Lucifer. That fall propels both Christian history and Milton’s epic toward the same eschaton, the return of Christ in judgment. If Satan’s fall constitutes a beginning, the point of origin on the line of Christian history, then we are invited to read “Corsica” analogously, as an origin point. And the poem does open Barbauld’s volume, suggesting that all subsequent poems unfold away from “Corsica” toward some other eschaton, presumably the volume’s final

poem (in the 1792 ed), “Epistle to W. Wilberforce, Esq.,” which itself ends with a stirring political prophecy:

Succeeding times your struggles, and their fate,  
With mingled shame and triumph shall relate;  
While faithful History, in her various page,  
Marking the features of this motley age,  
To shed a glory, and to fix a stain,  
Tells how you strove, and that you strove in vain. (118–23)

“Corsica” establishes itself as its own apocalyptic moment—as an end in and of itself. Barbauld the reviser and rearranger is struggling with and against her own experiences, the knowledge gained from two decades of largely futile revolutionary struggle. The apocalyptic mode, it seems, offers a creative alternative to despair.

Yet Barbauld’s vision of history does not follow a paradigmatic Christian/Miltonic eschatology, although “Corsica” does introduce a decidedly Miltonic apocalyptic anxiety. The lines immediately following the address, which situates Corsica in time as well as evokes *Paradise Lost*, reiterate Barbauld’s eschatological concerns by using another apocalyptic trope: the three ages of history: “And are there yet, in this late sickly age, / Unkindly to the tow’ring growths of virtue, / Such bold exalted spirits?” (1). Joachim of Fiore’s division of history into three unfolding epochs stands behind Barbauld’s demarcation of “this late sickly age”. Marjorie Reeves’s discussion of Joachim of Fiore in the history of Christian apocalyptic thought, still relevant, along with Wittreich’s early essay “Blake’s Milton: ‘To Immortals,...A Mighty Angel,’” aligns Milton and Blake in the Joachimite tradition. Yet an alternative classical, rather than

Christian paternal, tradition is evoked by Barbauld's use of the three ages of history trope in Ovid. Viewed through this additional context, Barbauld's visionary orientation becomes clearer.

Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses* outlines a sense of history that is regressive rather than progressive—a slow erosion of the human condition from a pristine golden age to an impious iron age marked by labor, commerce, and social disorder:

What bestowed  
its name upon the last age was hard iron.  
And this, the worst of ages, suddenly  
gave way to every foul impiety;  
Earth saw the flight of faith and modesty  
and truth—and in their place came snares and fraud,  
deceit and force and sacrilegious love  
of gain. Men spread their sails before the winds,  
.....

And now the ground,  
which once—just like the sunlight and the air—  
had been a common good, one all could share,  
was marked and measured by the keen surveyor—  
he drew the long confines, the boundaries. (8)

This outline of history lacks an eschaton, an end time. Ovid's corrupted Iron Age, the materiality of which is foregrounded in Mandelbaum's translation, seems closer to Barbauld's "sickly age" than Joachim's culminating Age of the Holy Spirit—even if the time, for Barbauld, is "late." The introduction of an Ovidian sense of history into a stricter Christian apocalyptic

configuration mitigates the issue of predestination, which threatens to attach itself to “Corsica” by virtue of Paoli’s defeat and the subsequent French occupation, without downplaying the severity of the social disorder represented by that defeat, which in turn compromises the structural integrity of the revolutionary ideals Barbauld holds. It is worth noting, too, that Barbauld returns to Ovid later in the volume, in a poem entitled “Ovid to his Wife,” suggesting Ovid’s continued intertextual presence in the volume. Barbauld returns to Ovid later in the volume, in a poem entitled “Ovid to his Wife.” There, Barbauld’s Ovid is burned out, retreating from the civic arena into domestic security:

I bend beneath the weight of broken years,  
Averse to change, and chilled with causeless fears.  
  
The season now invites me to retire  
To the dear lares of my household fire;  
To homely scenes of calm domestic peace,  
A poet’s leisure, and an old man’s ease;  
To wear the remnant of uncertain life  
In the fond bosom of a faithful wife; (7–14)

Historically, the exact reasons for Ovid’s exile are unknown: “all that can be reconstructed from Ovid’s own hints is a vague picture of involuntary complicity . . . in some scandal affecting the imperial house. Tomis, a superficially Hellenized town with a wretched climate on the extreme edge of the empire, was a singularly cruel place in which to abandon Rome’s most urbane poet” (para. 1). Whatever the exact causes, the exile has been interpreted politically in British literature. Heather James, in her survey of sixteenth-century English commentaries and poetic adaptations, claims that “Ovid had a political status in early modern

England” (344). Maggie Kilgour analyzes Ovidian exile as a major influence on Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* (285).

“Corsica” seems to configure history so as to stave off the fate of the disengaged, exilic poet. Just as Barbauld’s foregrounding the date of composition for the 1792 edition of “Corsica” establishes an apocalyptic context, she likewise emphasizes the disordered—even unnaturally so—nature of her “late sickly age” by omitting parentheses from the next line, which in the 1773 first edition reads as an aside:

And are there yet, in this late sickly age  
(Unkindly to the tow’ring growths of virtue)  
Such bold exalted spirits? Men whose deeds,  
To the bright annals of old GREECE oppos’d,  
Would throw in shades her yet unrival’d name,  
And dim the lustre of her fairest page! (2)

A seemingly minor revision, the removal of the parentheses suggests that the present moment, rife with Ovidian decline, haunted by the specter of Christian apocalypse, is a clear and present threat to virtue, a term Barbauld returns to again and again both in “Corsica” and throughout her entire corpus of work—underscoring its centrality to her vision. Virtue is a public moral, a political principle; its antonym, Barbauld asserts in her fearlessly republican “On the Expected General Rising of the French Nation in 1792” (1793; 1825), is hopelessness:

Rise , mighty nation, in thy strength,  
And deal thy dreadful vengeance round;  
Let thy great spirit, roused at length,  
Strike hordes of despots to the ground!

Devoted land! thy mangled breast  
Eager the royal vultures tear;  
By friends betrayed, by foes opprest,---  
And Virtue struggles with Despair. (1–8)

If we are to understand the particular threat to virtue Barbauld is identifying, then we must understand history as Barbauld does—as a particularly textual phenomenon. The “deeds” of men, which threaten “the tow’ring growths of virtue,” are placed in opposition as well to “To the bright annals of old GREECE” (1; emphasis added). According to Johnson, annals are “Histories digested in the exact order of time; narratives in which every event is recorded under its proper year.” That the term had particular classical resonance is attested by the fact that Johnson provides an illustrative quotation from Dryden’s translation of Virgil. (*A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 of 2 [London, 1755]). Barbauld posits that history is the narrative of human endeavors that unfold in and are thus demarcated by strict time, which is fundamentally textual in nature. Presumably, those who can read and appreciate the historical narratives of classical Greek democracy are likewise virtuous, and the foes of virtue seek to erase that story, along with the story of Corsican independence, which Barbauld sets up as an eighteenth-century analogue to democratic Athens: those foes “Would throw in shades her yet unrival’d name, / And dim the lustre of her fairest page!” (2). The motif of lightness and darkness, of liberty and tyranny, of enlightenment and ignorance, allows Barbauld to portray the idea of writing as illumination.

Here, we see Barbauld’s first configuration of constructive poetical action—of poetic composition as political behavior. She appeals to the British people as analogues of the

Corsicans—and by extension as analogues of the ancient Greek democrats: “What then should BRITONS feel? should they not catch / The warm contagion of heroic ardour, / And kindle at a fire so like their own?” (2). The idea of “LIBERTY” (2) as contagious should recall the pathology of Barbauld’s apocalyptic sense of history, the “late sickly age” (1) of the poem’s present. Here, however, “contagion” is an antidote to social disorder—and that contagion is defined specifically as “heroic ardour” (2); the fire imagery of the next line, coming as it does on the heels of Barbauld’s light-as-literature motif, can be read as an invitation to write, heroically, of Corsican independence. We should understand “heroic ardour” as both an active human response and a statement of poetics. Corsica, a metonymic representation of the broader concept liberty, deserves to be brought to light in epic fashion. The poet, by so doing, actively participates in the struggles of history as it is unfolding toward some kind of eschaton.

We might expect Barbauld, having established the need for a Corsican epic, to undertake one. In fact, by all rights “Corsica” itself ought to deliver such epic treatment. And to a certain degree it does. Yet before commencing what we might call the Corsican epic proper, Barbauld surprisingly offers commentary on Boswell’s *An Account of Corsica* (1768):

Such were the working thoughts which swell’d the breast  
Of generous BOSWELL; when with nobler aim  
And views beyond the narrow beaten track  
By trivial fancy trod, he turn’d his course  
From polish’d Gallia’s soft delicious vales,  
From the grey reliques of imperial Rome,  
From her long galleries of laurel’d stone,  
Her chisel’d heroes and her marble gods,



Whose dumb majestic pomp yet awes the world,  
To animated forms of patriotic zeal;  
Warm in the living majesty of virtue;  
Elate with fearless spirit; firm; resolv'd;  
By fortune nor subdu'd, nor aw'd by power. (2-3)

Boswell's book constitutes for Barbauld an important change in literary focus: from Augustan neoclassicism, with its emphasis on Roman "reliques," to "animated forms of patriotic zeal." Barbauld understands Boswell's work to have made an important move in terms of the representation of history, from passive reconstruction of Augustan Rome—like the historiography of Gibbon—to a more active engagement with the politics of the day.

Boswell characterizes his own work in similar terms. In his dedication to Paoli, Boswell equates writing with political action: "I regret that I have neither power nor interest to enable me to render any essential service to you and to the brave Corsicans. I can only assure you of the most fervent wishes of a private gentleman" (vii-viii). The time of Byronic intervention has not yet come, and by that standard Boswell emerges from his polemic as something of a milquetoast activist. Yet Barbauld celebrates Boswell's efforts, or at least his choice of subject, in quasi-religious terms: Boswell is "Warm in the living *majesty* of virtue; / *Elate* with fearless *spirit*" (3; emphasis added). Still, Boswell lacks the "heroic ardour" of the epic poet; instead, according to his prefatory statement, he is responding to only "the ardour of publick curiosity" (ix). Here, Barbauld intervenes by epicizing Boswell's subject. It remains to be seen whether the poetic intervention of this sort constitutes a more active kind of engagement.

Instead of invoking a muse to commence the epic proper, however, Barbauld confesses to already being inspired by the spirit of liberty, with which much of the poem's

prefatory material has been concerned. The confession of inspiration, rather than the invocation of it, marks a significant shift in epic strategy by the poet, one which foregrounds the poetic ego as creator:

How raptur'd fancy burns, while warm in thought  
I trace the pictur'd landscape; while I kiss  
With pilgrim lips devout, the sacred soil  
Stain'd with the blood of heroes. CYRANUS, hail! (3)

As I have discussed above, Wittreich argues that prophetic/visionary poetry revises the epic form, breaking open its restrictive elements (Byron, of course, will do just that later in *Don Juan*). The same kind of religious fervor inspired by Barbauld's reading of Boswell is carried over into the poem's second address, for the poetic ego is enraptured with thoughts of ancient Corsica. The poet makes no claims to knowledge of Corsica through experience; rather, Barbauld's Corsica is known through texts. In a sense, Barbauld is epicizing the experience of thinking about Corsica through source texts about it, particularly Boswell's. By shifting to the name Cynus, Barbauld evokes Corsica's ancient past, particularly as that past was preserved in classical Greek sources. Boswell, too, addresses that same past: "The earliest accounts that we have of Corsica, are to be found in Herodotus" (57). In noting the term *Cynus* as the Greek name for Corsica, Smith also remarks on the adjectival derivative *Cyrneus*, "used by the Latin poets" (133). Barbauld's immediate conduit to those sources—Herodotus, Seneca, and others—is Boswell.

The lengthy description of Corsica's natural features that comes after Barbauld's quasi-invocation closely follows Boswell's first chapter, entitled "Of the Situation, Extent, Air, Soil, and Productions, of Corsica." Boswell devotes considerable space to a discussion of Corsica's

harbors: “Corsica is remarkably well furnished with good harbours....It has on the north Centuri. On the west San Fiorenzo, Isola Rossa, Calvi, Ajaccio. On the South it has Bonif(s)accio. And on the east Porto-Vecchio, Bastia and Macinajo. Of each of these I shall give some account”

(16). The attention Boswell gives to Corsican harbors and ports has political significance, given the tenuous and fraught diplomatic situation among Britain, France, and Corsica in the mid-1760s. Boswell underscores Corsica’s strategic maritime value:

From this account of the harbours of Corsica, it will appear of how great consequence an alliance with this island might be to any of the maritime powers of Europe. For a fleet stationed there, might command the navigation of Genoa, Tuscany, and the ecclesiastical state, that between Spain and Naples, and a good share of that to the Levant; not to mention its influence over that of Sardinia. And it may be material to observe, that vessels stationed in the ports of Corsica might be formidable to France, as the western side of the island is directly opposite to the extensive coast of Provence, on which a descent might be made with cruisers in a very short time. (21)

Barbauld, too, attends to Corsica’s harbors, echoing Boswell, but she significantly revises the source text, omitting Boswell’s militaristic emphasis on Corsican maritime value and recasting the import of Corsica’s many harbors: “Hail to thy winding bays, thy shelt’ring ports / And ample harbours, which inviting stretch / Their hospitable arms to every sail” (3). Boswell’s Corsica is a gateway for British dominance of the seas; Barbauld’s is an almost paradisiacal respite for seafarers. By de-militarizing Corsican ports and casting them instead as safe harbors, Barbauld situates her Cynus in the epic tradition, alongside other havens like Homer’s Phaeacia and Vergil’s Carthage. Boswell ends his account of Corsica’s geography and natural resources

with a long quotation from *Odyssey* 13, which introduces thusly: “I shall conclude this chapter with Homer’s description of Ithaca, which, in general, may be well applied to Corsica” (53).

Barbauld also echoes Boswell’s attention to Corsica’s mountainous terrain. Barbauld’s “rock of adamant,” according to Boswell, is quite literally an island of mountains:

Diodorus Siculus describes Corsica as an extensive island, very mountainous, abounding in large forests, and watered with many rivulets....Indeed the interior parts of the island are in general mountainous, though interspersed with fruitful valleys; but have a peculiar grand appearance, and inspire one with the genius of the place; with that undaunted and inflexible spirit, which will not bow to oppression. (26-27)

Boswell follows these lines with an illustrative quotation from Homer, the first time Boswell evokes an analogue between Homer’s Ithaca and Corsica (*Odyssey* 9.27). After giving the Greek text, Boswell offers Pope’s translation: “Strong are her sons, tho’ rocky are her shores.”

Barbauld’s own description of Corsica’s mountainous terrain seemingly adapts Boswell’s choice of Homeric illustration, linking the fortitude of the land’s people to its geological makeup: “Thy swelling mountains, brown with solemn shade / Of various trees, that wave their giant arms / O’re the rough sons of freedom” (4).

Barbauld’s use of Boswell is perhaps most noticeable in her description of Corsica’s arboreal and vegetative nature—but so too is her reworking of the source text. Particular plants and trees that appear in Barbauld’s poetic description are also noted by Boswell. For instance, Boswell notes that “(t)he Corsican mountains are covered with the arbutus or strawberry tree, which gives a rich glowing appearance as far as the eye can reach. Indeed the island is very like the country which Virgil describes as the seat of rural felicity” (46). The passage ends with a

quotation from Virgil's second Georgic (520ff). In Barbauld's terms, the same idea is slightly recast: "while glowing bright / Beneath the various foliage, wildly spreads / The arbutus, and rears his scarlet fruit" (4). The poet omits the Virgilian reference altogether, reworking the source text in a surprising manner given the volume's early investment in classical analogues. Although not strictly pastoral, Boswell's passage about strawberry-topped mountains and its illustrative citation collapses the Virgilian georgic into a more general kind of idyllic description.

Renaissance pastoral tended to absorb the strictly georgic, but "[e]ighteenth-century poetic practice...regularly separated georgic from pastoral in ways that the renaissance tradition does not" (Lindheim 336n12); Kurt Heinzelman makes the point in stronger terms: "Since the days of Augustus, the genre [georgic] has enjoyed only sporadic cultural visibility. One such high-profile period was the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century" (182); and Bruce E. Graver pinpoints the specific relevance of georgic to eighteenth-century Britain: "Much has been made of the relationship of the georgic to agrarian reform and the economic condition of rural laborers" during the period in question (347). However, we reasonably can exempt Boswell from the kind of strictly critical distinctions Lindheim, Heinzelman, and Graver identify in eighteenth-century British culture. Moreover, the subsuming of georgic into pastoral still occurred in the eighteenth century as it had in the renaissance. For example, Moses Browne's prefatory essay to *Piscatory Eclogues* (1735) offers a definition of pastoral commensurate with how Boswell uses Virgil's Georgic 2:

So that be the Manners of the Speakers but adapted to the Simplicity of the Golden Age, let 'em have but Leisure for their Muses, and the Country for their Retirement, and whether they are Shepherds, Herdsmen, Anglers, Fishers, Fowlers, it is equally indifferent. Nature is a large Field for Contemplation, and

the Observations which present themselves from Floods, Hills, Woods, Valleys, and Plains, and other various Orders of Inhabitants, may furnish the pastoral Poet with familiar and beautiful Ideas. (15-16)

When we consider, however, that Boswell casts Corsica in more overtly pastoral terms throughout his discussion of Corsica's geography and natural resources, the purpose for Barbauld's revision becomes apparent.

Boswell's Corsica is an idealized space. In several key passages, Boswell represents the Corsican landscape and inhabitants as pastoral. Corsica's mountains, to which he likens the Corsican peoples' indomitable strivings for liberty, are also sites of Arcadian tranquility:

The Corsican villages are frequently built upon the very summits of their mountains, on craggy cliffs of so stupendous a height, that the houses can hardly be distinguished during the day; but at night, when the shepherds kindle their fires, the reflection of such a variety of lights, makes these aerial villages have a most picturesque and pleasing appearance (29).

Later, he is explicit: "There are here a vast number of goats, which browse upon the wild hills, and put one in mind of Virgil's *Bucolicks*, where mention is so often made of this animal" (40). In another passage, he discusses the production of honey on Corsica and cites Virgil's ninth *Eclogue*, which addresses the same topic:

Indeed the laurel, the almon tree, and the myrtle, in the flowers of which, the bees find so much sweetness, are very common here; and the hills are all covered with wild thyme, and other fragrant herbs. Yet its honey hath always been accounted bitter, by reason of the boxwood and yew...which make Virgil's *Lycidas* with

Sic tua Cynnaeas fugiant examina taxos.

VIRG. Eclog. ix. 30.

-----So may thy bees refuse

The baneful juices of Cynnaean yews.

WARTON. (49)

Collectively, these passages present Corsica as a modern Arcadia, whose idyllic nature nurtures its peoples' opposition to tyranny and pursuit of liberty.

Barbauld echoes these passages but erases all traces of the pastoral. The deliberateness of this move is demonstrated by the fact that elsewhere in the volume she makes extensive use of pastoral. Yet in treating Corsica's honey, for example, she follows Boswell but removes the Virgilian context:

And spreading chesnut, with each humbler plant,  
And shrub of fragrant leaf, that clothes their sides  
With living verdure; whence the clust'ring bee  
Extracts her golden dews: the shining box,  
And sweet-leaved myrtle, aromatic thyme,  
The prickly juniper, and the green leaf  
Which feeds the spinning worm. (4)

For Barbauld the same landscape and resources so idyllically represented by Boswell are not pastoral phenomena at all. Rather, Corsica's natural worth constitutes only a potentiality, serving to set in harsh relief the need for Corsican independence. Until liberty defines Corsica's political reality in the same way that its wealth of resources defines its natural reality, then pastoral contentment is only a future possibility:

To smile at danger, then the hand that rais'd  
Shall hush the storm, and lead the shining train  
Of peaceful years in bright procession on.  
*Then* shall the shepherd's pipe, the muse's lyre,  
On Cynus' shores be heard" (11, emphasis added).

Barbauld's pastoral vision for Corsica, however, is a dissonance that jars against the apocalyptic tones of the poem's opening. In order to better synthesize that opening apocalypticism with the section of the poem that follows it, a paradisiacal but de-pastoralized description of Corsica that Barbauld creates out of Boswell, we must consider another textual analogue, one which the apocalyptic *salve* of "Corsica" has already evoked: Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

For Barbauld, Corsica is not the idyllic pastoral space it is in Boswell but instead a fallen Miltonic Eden. Boswell also puts us in mind of Milton's paradisiacal garden when he says of Corsica that "[i]n general, it may be observed that this island is so privileged by nature, that there is no poisonous animal in it" (44). Yet if Boswell's turn of phrase conjures an Edenic image, it does so in a way that complements his broader representation of Corsica as a pastoral island paradise, a naturally safe haven for liberty in Europe. Barbauld's Corsica, however, is a darker place of "living verdure" (4) and "savage forests, awful, deep: / Thy tangled thickets, and thy crowded woods, / The haunt of herds untam'd" (5), a description that seems to anticipate Coleridge's *Kubla Kahn*. Here again, Barbauld distances herself from the source text, Boswell, this time by recalling Satan's, and the reader's, first view of Eden in book four,

where delicious Paradise,  
Now nearer, Crowns with her enclosure green  
As with a rural mound the champain head



Of a steep wilderness, whose hairie sides  
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,  
Access deni'd; and over head up grew  
Insuperable highth of loftiest shade,  
Cedar, and Pine, and Firr, and branching Palm,  
A Silvan Scene, and as the ranks ascend  
Shade above shade, a woodie Theatre  
of Stateliest view. (*PL* 4.132-42)

Milton's Eden is a virginal *locus amoenus*, but it is not a safe space: its "undergrowth / Of shrubs and tangling bushes had perplex / All path of Man or Beast that past that way" (4.175-77), but despite such seemingly protective wilderness Satan "At one slight bound high overleap'd all bound / Of Hill or highest Wall, and sheer within / Lights on his feet" (4.181-83). This threatened paradise motif fits with Barbauld's broader presentation of the struggle for Corsican independence; yet if Barbauld's aim is to rework a too-idealized source text (Boswell) by erasing its pastoral elements, we need to reconcile that end with her evocation of the moment long identified as commencing the pastoral section of *Paradise Lost*.

Many twentieth-century critics have commented on the pastoral nature of book four and the first half of book five. Louis L. Martz, expanding the analysis of a stylistic feature first noted by Alexander Pope, characterizes the "simpler style" of book 4 as congruent with its pastoral setting (*Paradise Within* 117-22). Roger B. Rollin identifies elements of tragic-comic pastoral drama, perhaps vestiges of Milton's early plans to dramatize the Fall of Man, in Milton's presentation of Adam, who is "eased into his role of Everyman as pastoral swain" in book 4 (3). Galbraith Miller Crump, following Martz, offers one of the more ardent commentaries, claiming

“Book IV provides the most perfect pastoral moment” in the epic (90). Martz himself revisits the issue, situating Milton’s presentation of Eden in a long pastoral tradition with especially rich Ovidian echoes (*Poet of Exile* 219-26) . In her seminal study of literary modes in *Paradise Lost*, Lewalski explicates rich complexities of tradition and form in the “Edenic pastoral” of book four:

Though our first parents are gardeners rather than shepherds or herdsmen, their life in Eden exhibits the essential qualities of Golden Age or Arcadian pastoral: freedom and leisure; the perfect harmony of man and nature; an abundance of natural goods satisfying all human needs; a range of activities consisting primarily of love, song, and pleasant conversation; and pastoral *otium*. (*Paradise Lost* 173-74, 178)

More recently, Lindheim has offered a succinct summary explanation for Milton’s turn to the pastoral in book four, arguing

pastoral...deals with fundamental questions about humanity. By asking what is natural for human beings, pastoral consciously and normatively explores our relation with civilization, with nature, and even with the cosmos. For the Renaissance writer, pastoral was clearly associated with the major poetic themes. Spenser, for example, turns to pastoral to examine time, death, and the natural order in *The Shepheardes Calender*, or to explore the roots of civilization and social cohesion in book 6 of *The Faerie Queene*. Milton, too, conceives pastoral in this way, not only in the Eden of *Paradise Lost* but earlier in *Lycida*, where tragic questionings implicit in pastoral elegy are insisted upon. (270)

By contrast, Ruth Summar McIntyre argues against thinking of Milton's Eden as pastoral (145-67), although the critical tradition she confronts is substantial. These representative commentaries suggest the degree to which pastoral poetics have come to shape our present understanding of the same Miltonic Eden that Barbauld seems to evoke in order to de-pastoralize Boswell's Corsica.

In order to better contextualize Barbauld's rhetorical design, we must appreciate the extent to which the twentieth-century commentary tradition of reading *Paradise Lost* book four as pastoral stands upon substantial eighteenth-century Miltonic reception. I have suggested above that Martz's discussion of book four's simpler style has its roots in Pope, whose own criticism of Miltonic style was recorded by Joseph Spense:

Milton's style in his *Paradise Lost* is not natural; it is an exotic style. As his subject lies a good deal out of our world, it has a particular propriety in those parts of the poem; and when he is on earth, whenever he is describing our parents in Paradise, you see he uses a more easy and natural way of writing. Though his forced style may fit the higher parts of his own poem, it does very ill for others who write on natural and pastoral subjects. Philips, in his *Cyder*, has succeeded extremely well in imitation of it, but was quite wrong in endeavoring to imitate it on such a subject. (qtd. in Shawcross, *John Milton* 2:132)

Pope's reference to Philips's *Cyber* serves as well to entangle Milton's book-four pastoral in the early eighteenth-century pastoral controversy waged between Pope and Philips, suggesting that the recognition of Milton's Eden as pastoral was fairly well established by the time Barbauld wrote "Corsica."

Two other major eighteenth-century critics, Addison early on and Johnson at mid-century, recognized the pastoral in Milton's Eden. In *Tatler* No. 114, Addison addresses *Paradise Lost* 4.643-56:

The Variety of Images in this Passage is infinitely pleasing, and the Recapitulation of each particular Image, with a little varying of the Expression, makes one of the finest Turns of Words that I have ever seen: Which I rather mention, because Mr. *Dryden* has said in his Preface to *Juvenal*, That he could meet with no Turn of Words in *Milton*.

It may further be observed, That though the Sweetness of the Verses has something in it of a Pastoral, yet it excels the ordinary Kind, as much as the Scene of it is above an ordinary Field or Meadow. (227-28)

More than merely recognizing pastoral in book four, as does Pope, Addison pronounces its superiority over other pastorals by virtue of its grand subject, the prelapsarian state of humanity. Later in the century, Johnson's commentary is, if no less cognizant of Miltonic pastoral, perhaps more tepid in its praise. In *Rambler* No. 36, Johnson explicates Milton's pastoral treatment of Eden against a misconception of primitive poetics:

It has been maintained by some, who love to talk of what they do not know, that pastoral is the most ancient poetry; and indeed, since it is probable that poetry is nearly of the same antiquity with rational nature, and since the life of the first men was certainly rural, we may reasonably conjecture, that, as their ideas would necessarily be borrowed from those objects with which they were acquainted, their composures, being filled chiefly with such thoughts on the visible creation as must occur to the first observers, were pastoral hymns like those which *Milton*

introduces the original pair singing, in the day of innocence, to the praise of their Maker (196).

Addison, Pope, and Johnson, three of the towering voices in eighteenth-century criticism, all recognized the pastoral nature of Milton's Eden.

The same critical perspective articulated, albeit through varying formulations, by Addison, Pope, and Johnson found its way, perhaps under their influence, into eighteenth-century poetry as well. Shawcross has noted a significant echo of Milton's Eden in William Collins's "Ode on the Poetical Character" (1747), demonstrating that Collins's "scene is borrowed from Milton's description of Eden, expressed in such Miltonic diction as 'Prospect wild,' 'o'erbrow,' 'embrown,' 'His Ev'ning Ear,' and 'Trump,' among other echoes." (John Milton 75). Yet Collins was not an outlier. Thomson's *The Seasons*, perhaps the high watermark of pre-romantic—or at least pre-Blakean—canonical pastoral, also appreciatively recalls Milton's pastoral book four among other Miltonic poetics:

Is not each great each amiable Muse  
Of Classic Ages in thy MILTON met?  
A Genius universal as his Theme,  
Astonishing as Chaos, as the Bloom  
Of blowing Eden fair, as Heaven sublime. ("Summer" 1152-56)

Earlier in the century, a number of minor poets re-present Milton's pastoral Eden in various ways. In *Milton's Sublimity Asserted: In a Poem. Occasion'd by a Late Celebrated Piece, entituled, Cyder, a Poem; in Blank Verse, by Philo-Milton* (1709), written by John Philips, we find an extended recreation of Edenic pastoral in verse-criticism of the poet Milton:

If Vagrant in Digression, *Milton* roves,

Beyond the Confines of his *Eden*'s ground,  
'Tis like the *Bee*, hard Traveller on Flowers,  
For Honey Foraging to store her Hive;  
When laden with the Amber Drops she comes  
To hoard her Riches, in their waxen Cells (27).

William Lux's "The Garden" (1719) likewise presents, using pastoral language, Milton as the poet of *Paradise Lost* four:

This only to that sacred Garden yields,  
Once fix'd by Heav'n in *Eden*'s happy Fields;  
Delicious Spot! whose Glories none excel,  
Which...*Milton*'s Pencil cou'd describe so well;  
So warm his Colours, his Design so new,  
The painted Flow'rs seem fairer than the True. (6)

Lux concretizes his identification in no uncertain terms, affixing a note to his use of *Milton* that reads "See Mr. *Milton*'s Description of *Paradise*, B. 4. of his Poem" (6). In yet another example of Milton's close association with pastoral, not only as the pastoral elegist of *Lycidas* but also as the epicist of *Paradise Lost*, extracts from *Paradise Lost* 4.750-62 serve as the epigraph to an English translation of Virgil's Eclogue 1, entitled *Jacob and Rachel: A Pastoral* (1737).

Two examples from the middle of the century suggest that this poetical conceptualization had significant staying power in the eighteenth century. The first is found in William Thompson's *The Progress of Sickness* (1757), where the Miltonic Eden is evoked in a more sweeping classical pastoral context:

Now in *Elysium* lap'd, and lovely Scenes,

Where Honeysuckles rove, and Eglantines,  
Narcissus, Jes'min, Pinks, profusely wild,  
In every scented Gale *Arabia* breathe:  
As blissful *Eden* fair; the *Morning-work*  
Of *Heav'n*, and *Milton's* Theme! where Innocence  
Smile'd, and improv'd the Prospect. (249)

In Mason's *Musaeus: A Monody to the Memory of Mr. Pope: In Imitation of MILTON'S Lycidas*, which also was anthologized in the third volume of the fifth edition of *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes. By Several Hands* (1758), the pastoral poet of *Paradise Lost* book four is re-subsumed into its (<—his?) younger, pastoral elegist persona:

Last came a bard of more exalted tread,  
and THYRSIS [Milton] hight by Dryad, Fawn, or Swain,  
Whene'er he mingled with the sylvan train;  
But seldom that; for higher thoughts he fed;  
For him full oft the heav'nly Muses led  
To clear Euphrates, and the secret mount,  
To Araby, and Eden, fragrant climes;  
All which the sacred bard would oft recount:  
And thus in strain, unus'd in grove or shade,  
To sad MUSAEUS rightful homage paid. (308-9)

As all of these examples collectively demonstrate, Milton the Edenic pastoralist was well represented through the late 1750s, and it is unlikely that any poetic echoing of Milton's Eden could escape the pastoral context that had attached itself to *Paradise Lost* book four.

With that understanding of Milton in mind, Barbauld's Edenic allusion becomes clearer. It appears at the conclusion of a lengthy description of Corsica's natural features and resources both modeled on and simultaneously critical of similar descriptions in Boswell's *Account*. Whereas Boswell introduces pastoral overtones into his discussion, Barbauld—despite the use of conventional pastoral phraseology and imagery—relegates the pastoral to the possible, when the realization of liberty will allow “the shepherd's pipe, the muse's lyre, / On CYRNUS' shores be heard” (11). When Barbauld evokes Milton's Eden, then, she does so to summarize the description it concludes:

Hail to thy savage forests, awful, deep:  
Thy tangled thickets, and thy crowded woods,  
The haunt of herds untam'd; which sullen bound  
From rock to rock with fierce unsocial air,  
And wilder gaze, as conscious of the power  
That loves to reign amid the lonely scenes  
Of unquelled nature, precipices huge,  
And tumbling torrents; trackless deserts, plains  
Fenc'd in with guardian rocks, whose quarries teem  
With shining steel, that to the cultur'd fields  
And sunny hills which wave with bearded grain  
Defends their homely produce. (5)

This extended allusion to Milton's Eden presages the pastoral vision that concludes the epic proper, but it does so through negation—it insists on the pastoral insufficiency of Corsica while the liberty of its peoples goes unrealized. Three key phrases are negatively constructed: “herds



untam'd," "fierce unsocial air," and "the lonely scenes / Of unquelled nature." Coupled with the passage's more general mood, noticeable in the phrases "savage forests, awful, deep"; "crowded woods, / The haunt of herds untam'd"; "sullen bound...with fierce unsocial air"; "wilder gaze"; "precipices huge"; "tumbling torrents"; and "trackless deserts," the negative constructions contribute to an image of Corsica as dread wilderness, a space whose beauty is almost overwhelmed by the vastness of its awe. In other words, Corsica is a Miltonic Eden by virtue of its constant and overpowering insecurity rather than its pastoral bliss.

The Eden of *Paradise Lost* four is itself a troubled space. Most critics who recognize species of pastoral in Milton's Garden qualify that recognition by discussing Eden as a threatened paradise, which the poem itself makes clear. The reader's first glimpse of Eden is also Satan's, who invades the space with shocking ease well before his temptation of Eve succeeds. Even John R. Knott, whose *Milton's Pastoral Vision* (1971) provides the most extended and thorough analysis of the pastoral in *Paradise Lost*, underscores the constancy of the threat to Eden, an almost crippling weight that in some ways contributes to book four's pastoral nature, insofar as the pastoral convention of idyllic safety and *otium* always in some way or another points to the materialism of their antonyms: "Much of the power of *PL* arises from the fact that the pastoral center of the poem will not hold; Milton's vision of the ideal pastoral life on earth dissolves in the face of Satan's assault and man's subsequent sin" (xiii-xiv).

Barbauld, by virtue of evoking Milton's Eden at all, also simultaneously evokes its subtext of ever approaching danger. This point is made clear by her own Edenic passage's most overt gesture to *Paradise Lost* four:

Trackless deserts, plains

Fenc'd in with guardian rocks, whose quarries teem

With shining steel, that to the cultur'd fields  
And sunny hills which wave with bearded grain  
Defends their homely produce. (5)

In *Paradise Lost*, the mighty wall around paradise is one of Milton's most memorable poetic images:

Yet higher than thir tops  
The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung:  
Which to our general Sire gave prospect large  
Into his neather Empire neighbouring round. (4.142-45)

That wall, of course, proves no obstacle at all to Satan's invasion; just as the Satanic presence in "Corsica," the threat to liberty and virtue posed by militaristic Genoese and French and even British imperialism, cannot be barred Corsica's "guardian rocks."

Those rocks do fence in a material reality consisting of mining and agriculture, which introduces a georgic element into "Corsica" that further distances Barbauld's description of the island from any pastoral context. We have already seen Boswell carry out an analogous synthesis of the georgic into the pastoral, but here Barbauld reconstitutes that process in reverse. She seems to pull the georgic out of the pastoral, quite literally fencing it off from the quasi-pastoral description of Corsica's natural landscapes. That pulling out—that setting aside of a clearly demarcated space for material reality—also constitutes a major rewriting of Milton as well, whose own Edenic pastoral, as Lewalski argues, contains then gives way to the georgic until the tragedy of the fall subsumes both:

Milton employs specific literary modes in *Paradise Lost* to characterize the various orders of being: the heroic mode for Satan and his damned society; mixed

for the celestial order; pastoral (opening out to georgic and comedic) for prelapsarian life in Eden; tragic (encompassing at length postlapsarian georgic, pastoral, and heroic) for human life in the fallen world. (19)

If labor, specifically conventional georgic modes of work like mining and farming, is a condition of fallen humanity, then its presence troubles any Arcadian paradisiacal space, quite literally introducing an Iron-Age reality into a Golden-Age illusion. Likewise, Knott is correct when he argues that “Milton’s Eden is much more Arcadian...than that of other works dealing with the fall of man, most of which have little to say about the manner of life in Paradise” (xii); but that very Arcadia Knott identifies self-reflexively pronounces its own illusory nature, a point Knott comes close to conceding when he reminds us that “[m]uch of the power of *Paradise Lost* arises from the fact that the pastoral center of the poem will not hold; Milton’s vision of the ideal pastoral life on earth dissolves in the face of Satan’s assault and man’s subsequent sin” (xiii-xiv). Barbauld, by removing the paradisiacal from a pastoral context, thoroughly grounds her Corsica in a georgic reality. By so doing, she opens up the possibility of a reified pastoral, a pastoral reality that is not an idyllic fiction but a mode of literary representation, a poeticizing of the actual, wherein the “shepherd’s pipe...shall consecrate / To after-ages” the name of Paoli (11), Barbauld’s metonym for virtuous liberty and “The freedom of the mind” (12).

The vision that “Corsica” purports to articulate, then, seems relatively straightforward. The political triumph of constitutional liberty will bring about a kind of paradisiacal Eden, restoring to fallen humanity through the virtue of liberty a kind of freedom not attained since the expulsion of Adam and Eve. The potential of Corsica to realize such redemption makes up Barbauld’s adaptation of Boswell’s *Account*, a simultaneous critique *cum* revision enacted by depastoralizing Boswell’s idyllic propaganda that nevertheless points out the pastoral possibility

inherent in the landscape, which Barbauld achieves by evoking Milton's threatened Eden. If Corsican independence, constructed out of virtuous liberty that facilitates the "freedom of the mind" (12), a freedom of conscience underwriting a constitutionally independent, self-governing and self-determining polity, is understood by Barbauld to bring about the restoration of prelapsarian liberties, then the pastoral vision of "Corsica" is likewise apocalyptic, analogically evoking the reunion of humanity and divinity, the restoration of the prototypical lost paradise. As we have seen already, Barbauld situates her poem within a context of political apocalypticism, foregrounding the *annus terribilis* of the Corsican revolution's failure in 1769. Out of that failure, though, Barbauld shapes a pastoral vision that itself constitutes an apocalyptic sensibility reinscribed with the figurative eschaton of liberty, the virtue that will restore humanity to a political paradise on earth, and the engagement with pastoral, georgic, etc, is an element of visionary poetics.

Here again, Barbauld engages with Milton; she prophesies the return to Edenic bliss through the realization of liberty. Where Milton's prophecies rearticulate and re-imagine the end of history through a poetic reconstruction of the fall of man and the progression of subsequent history toward the return of Christ in judgment, Barbauld's "Corsica" likewise adopts the language and imagery of apocalypticism to advance the pastoral vision, but it does so by working through Milton in order to adapt Miltonic prophecy toward a pastoral end: a restored Eden brought about not by the end of history through divine judgment but rather by the full realization of human potential through the judicious employment of the virtue of liberty—the establishment of polities determined by free-thinking people. Barbauld's prophecy does not envision the end of history; it seeks to redirect the progression of history toward an envisioned end, the literal fulfillment of a figurative pastoral ideal, a construction of Eden out of the threatened paradisiacal

wilderness of Corsica. Milton's Eden, as we have seen, adopts and adapts the pastoral mode. We have yet to examine, however, the visionary poetics behind that adoption and adaptation. By understanding the relationship between prophecy and pastoral in the fourth book of *Paradise Lost*, we can understand the degree to which Barbauld adopts and adapts Milton in her own pastoral prophecy.

The Miltonic bard that narrates *Paradise Lost* sets the stage for "the vision of Eden before the Fall (IV-IX), which embraces the visions of both the celestial warfare (VI) and the creation (VII)" (Wittreich, *Visionary Poetics* 186) by uttering the poem's most direct evocation of the prophet of the Apocalypse, John of Patmos, at the opening of book four. The lines' intertextual heft establishes an apocalypticism that shades the remainder of the vision, including the pastoral description of Eden that follows some one hundred and thirty lines later:

O for that warning voice, which he who saw  
Th' *Apocalyps*, heard cry in Heaven aloud,  
Then when the Dragon, put to a second rout,  
Came furious down to be reveng'd on men,  
*Wo to th'inhabitants on Earth!* (4.1-5)

This attempt by the bard to present himself as another John of Patmos, another prophet of apocalypse, happens also to raise important questions about the relationship between mode and poetics, between form and practice.

By associating himself so closely with the prophet of the Apocalypse, the same Miltonic bard who presents an Eden long recognized as bucolic links prophecy and pastoral. Lewalski explains this linkage as both a necessary reminder of the Genesis narrative of the Fall as well as another way of presenting prelapsarian Eden as a threatened or troubled space: "Another register,

defined at the outset of Book Four, is the Miltonic Bard in the role of a John of Patmos, certain of impending catastrophe but unable to forestall it” (176). Although the Bard “invites us in Book Four to respond to Eden as pastoral idyl,” Lewalski reminds us that we do so

from the vantage point of our human and fallen condition—with delight, nostalgia, and a sense of aching loss. The pastoral perspective emphasizes Eden’s fragility and vulnerability. In the literary tradition pastoral places are often destroyed by invaders embodying the values of court or city or savage nature: war, deception, ambition, brute force....We know of course that Eden will be destroyed, but the fragility emphasized in Book Four serves not only to foreshadow that eventuality but also to prepare us for the incorporation of hardier georgic and comedic elements into Edenic pastoral. (176-77)

In Biblical terms, the Apocalypse of John is necessitated by events in Genesis; under this paradigm, the failure that occurs in the pastoral garden gives way to the corrective apocalypse. Yet can we fully understand Milton’s Book Four in those terms? The apocalyptic Bard constructs a more stylized pastoral space than the scriptural source text on which it is modeled: “And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed” (Gen. 2:8), which becomes through the utterance of the Bard

A happy rural seat of various view;  
Groves whose rich Trees wept odorous Gumms and Balm,  
Others whose fruit burnisht with Golden Rind  
Hung amiable, *Hesperian* Fables true,  
If true, here only, and of delicious taste:  
Betwixt them Lawns, or level Downs, and Flocks

Grasing the tender herb, were interpos'd,  
Or palmie hilloc, or the flowrie lap  
Of som irriguous Valley spread her store,  
Flowrs of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose (4.247-56).

The pastoral space is a recollected space, reconstructed from the poetical magnification and supplementation of scripture, but it is not a strictly visionary or prophetic space either.

In fact, the whole of the Edenic vision catalogued by Wittreich reveals secret knowledge only of events that have already occurred, the war in heaven and the creation; the culminating prophecy, “Adam’s vision of future history” will not manifest itself for another seven books (*Visionary Poetics* 186), and by then the pastoral mode is a distant if painful memory, having passed through the tragic to the “prophetic, the mode through which fallen but redeemed humankind can come to terms with the woe of the fallen world” (Lewalski 254). The pastoral mode and the kind of idealized, if troubled, space it represents seemingly cannot support transformative or transcendent visions, only recollected, if re-imagined, visions of what has come before

The recollected or reconstructionary apocalypticism of Book Four suggests a means by which we can open up Barbauld’s visionary position in “Corsica.” For Barbauld, the pastoral space does not represent or nostalgically recall a lost paradise but rather offers an ideal that has not yet been realized. The means by which paradise may be regained, of course, is the intercession of the Son. The lost pastoral of Eden cannot be recovered in *Paradise Lost* but requires a second epic effort by Milton, which depicts the Son’s temptation in the wilderness.

Barbauld invites us to consider the means by which her own Edenic vision similarly may be realized, through the intercession of the patriot Paoli. In reintroducing Paoli, Barbauld's poetic language is at its most Miltonic:

for see the Man,  
Born to exalt his own, and give mankind  
A glimpse of higher natures: just, as great;  
The soul of council, and the nerve of war;  
Of high unshaken spirit, tempered sweet  
With soft urbanity, and polish'd grace,  
And attic wit, and gay unstudied smiles:  
Whom heaven in some propitious hour endow'd  
With every purer virtue: gave him all  
That lifts the hero, or adorns the man. (7-8)

Echoes of Milton ring throughout this description, which recalls the first reference to the Son in *Paradise Lost*, "till one greater Man / Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat" (1.4-5), as well as the first book of *Paradise Regained*, in which the Father underscores the Son's virtuous nature: "therefore secure / Ventures his filial Vertue, though untri'd, / Against whate're may tempt" (176-78). In short, Barbauld figures Paoli as a Christ-figure, whose dedicated and virtuous efforts to achieve liberty for Corsica will regain the pastoral ideal the island has lost through centuries of occupation. Though the Corsicans remain "Still unquell'd" (6), the idyllic potential of the island requires the intercession of Paoli, "this fair pattern of a God below" (8), to fully bloom:

Every name  
To virtue dear be from oblivion snatch'd



And plac'd among the stars; but chiefly thine,  
Thine, PAOLI... (11)

While it remains to further explicate why Barbauld figures Paoli in Miltonic Christological terms, that she does figure Paoli in this way suggests that Barbauld engages with Milton in a number of nuanced and outright revisionary ways in "Corsica." In this way, Barbauld situates herself among a tradition of visionary nonconformity by women poets.

\* \* \*

Milton, it seems, was ubiquitous in the long eighteenth century. Yet as the critical interlocutions of Barbauld demonstrate, Milton's ubiquity owes much to the visionary mode. If Milton stands at the intersection of various lines of tradition, he does so because of the ease with which his own work, so densely allusive, facilitates a particular kind of critical enterprise: the analysis of analogue texts for explicative purposes. As I have suggested, the poets studied in this project are, at least by outcome if not by design, Miltonists: their poetry works out and advances various, messy, often conflicting criticisms of Milton's own works. That this critical enterprise is secondary to other aims, a byproduct rather than a primary artistic motivation, strengthens the case for identifying Barbauld and her major precursors Barker, Rowe, and Leapor, as major practitioners of the prophetic mode. It is perhaps more accurate to say that Milton's omnipresence, like the visionary poetry of Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld, signifies the ubiquity of prophecy as a major literary mode in the long eighteenth century, absorbing a wide variety of genres.

Women made consistent and far-reaching contributions to that mode, a fact that has only been recognized periodically. For example, Orianne Smith's *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* advances the thesis that "The

political prophecies of Romantic women writers during the 1790s had a precedent in the Civil War decades when a series of sectarian female prophets in England—compelled by the urgency of the moment—launched themselves into the public sphere, offered themselves as intermediaries between God and His people, and interpreted contemporary political events as the catastrophic ushering in of the Last Days predicted in the book of Revelation” (1). Although Smith is working with a clear notion of literary tradition, and extends coverage to texts written before and after the apex of Romantic political prophecy in the French Revolutionary period, we are better off thinking of prophecy as a sustained, period-spanning approach of critical engagement, like the pastoral mode with which it shares many characteristics, rather than being a period-specific, go-to mode with special efficacy during times of extraordinary pressures. British literary prophecy, like its scriptural wellspring, is omnipresent—before and after Milton.

The ubiquity of the prophetic mode is apparent in another of Barbauld’s key prophecies, “Verses on Mrs. Rowe.” On the surface, the poem exhibits none of the Miltonic grandeur on display in “Corsica.” Yet the poem, a critical reading of Rowe, is another of Barbauld’s Miltonic interlocutions—that it so say, another poem in the prophetic mode.

Sainthood and election are fraught terms, which conjure complex and intersecting histories of theological disquisition, economics, and cultural identity. Yet in “Verses on Mrs. Rowe,” Barbauld articulates a theory of reading and rewriting—if you will, a poetics of election—that helps orient the larger prophetic project in which she engages: “Though for the bard my lines are far too faint, / Yet in my life let me transcribe the saint” (43–44). Barbauld’s position as a major dissenting voice invites a consideration of these lines in the context of eighteenth-century presbyterianism’s connections to seventeenth-century puritan doctrine and practices, which raises the specter of Milton. One of the issues with election, about which

considerable polemical and expository ink was spilt in the early modern period, was its uncertainty—that is, the difficulty with signifying election and of election’s being signified. Election remained speculative until death, and the access of empirical access to spiritual knowledge of life after death opens the door to prophetic, rather than doctrinal, discourse.

Barbauld, as one critic has pointed out, recognized the limitations of knowledge: “This acceptance that the truth is unattainable in this life explains her conviction that religious disputation is simply perpetuating irresolvable controversies, which, far from bringing us closer to the truth, cause us to doubt ‘established truths’ necessary to accept on faith” (Ready 181). If we accept the premise that Barbauld, like many later eighteenth-century dissenters who inherited a not unchanged puritan sensibility governing predestination, felt a profound discomfort with epistemological categories, then it is possible that the more stable realm of poetics, of reading (especially other women) poets whose work is principally prophetic (explicating the unknown, the uncertain, and the anxiety-inducing), Rowe’s sainthood or election can be used to sketch out an alternative theory of strong reading/rewriting—of visionary poetics—outside of the strict Wittreich paradigm.

Wittreich’s line of vision theory advances a definition of literary tradition based on critical interlocation, on creative rewriting: “the prophet asserts discontinuity between himself and his culture, whose collective minds he is assaulting, and continuity between himself and his precursors, whose visions he releases and then expands. Neither conservers nor confirmers of the prevailing orthodoxies, prophets are the agents through which new, more perfect and enduring ones are created.; prophets thus band together, sharing a common purpose founded upon the same ideological suppositions” (*Milton* 104–05). William McCarthy, author of an important critical biography of Barbauld, underscores the heterodoxy of Barbauld’s religious views: of her

1773 volume *Poems*, McCarthy notes that “readers would not fail to notice . . . that she was s Dissenter . . . Yet she is clearly not a stereotypical priggish ‘Presbyterian’” (110), citing “Verses on Mrs Rowe” as evidence that “[t]o claim Rowe as a model was to claim a high-minded and ecumenical heritage, not a stuffy or a ‘rigid’ one” (110). In other words, Barbauld’s interlocution with Rowe constitutes a version of the banding together Wittreich identifies as an essentially prophetic move.

Barbauld at several places conflates the writing of poetry with living a virtuous Christian life:

Blest shade! how pure a breath of praise was thine,  
Whose spotless life was faultless as thy line;  
In whom each worth and every grace conspire,---  
The Christian’s meekness, and the poet’s fire. (3–6)

The diction of these lines—and of the poem more generally—marks it, at some level, as theological; “grace” (5), “meekness” (6), and “virtue” (11), among other terms, establish grounds for theological contention, or at the very least theological disquisition. That the poem at the same articulates a critical argument about poetics integrates the disciplines or enterprises of poetry and theology rather seamlessly, recalling other theologian poets like Milton and indeed Rowe herself: “Without one fond reserve the world disclaims, / And gives up all her soul to heavenly flames” (25–26). Barbauld’s Rowe is apocalyptic visionary: the association of fire with vatician poetics is paradigmatic.

The fire imagery that signifies Barbauld’s identification of Rowe as a vatic poet also points to the broader context of Barbauld’s own apocalyptic thinking. Given her biographical association with Joseph Priestley—and her willingness to disagree both politically and

theologically with Priestley—a comparison of key differences between the Priestley’s millenarian thinking and Barbauld’s apocalyptic vision of Rowe in heaven helps to clarify the prophetic thinking at work in “Verses on Mrs Rowe.” In particular, we should appreciate the extent to which Barbauld, whose commitment to rational religion often conflicts with the apocalyptic underpinnings of the religious and literary traditions she operates within, looks to Rowe as a model, devising a schema of literary election to outline a prophecy designed to side-step accusations of enthusiasm.

Barbauld peppers the middle of the poem with occasional references, grounding Rowe firmly in the mainstream, rather than radical, culture of her day normalizes the visionary content of her work:

Her pious hand the poor, the mourner blest;  
Her image lived in every kindred breast.  
Thynn, Carteret, Blackmore, Orrery approved,  
And Prior praised, and noble Hertford loved;  
Seraphic Kenn, and tuneful Watts were thine,  
And virtue’s noblest champions filled the line. (29–34)

Barbauld employs a very particular Whig historiography here, the same Whig historiography responsible for transmuting Milton from republican regicide to dissenting apologist. In so doing, Barbauld softens the edges—without completely sanding away—Rowe’s own apocalyptic vaticism.

Barbauld’s Rowe is multifaceted—devoutly pious (“the Christian’s meekness” *and* “the poet’s fire” [6])—a nuanced critical reading that reminds us of the prophetic and devotional in Rowe. Indeed, fire imagery is prevalent in Rowe’s devout soliloquies:

Celestial excellence my eyes inspires,  
And kindles in my breast immortal fires.  
Thou bright, unrival'd object of my love,  
To thee alone my soft affections move;  
Thine are my rising hopes, my purest fires,  
My noblest wishes, and sublime desires. (Soliloquy XII, 9–14)

Indeed, Barbauld's poem on the death of Rowe seem partly to continue the epiphanic vision of the afterlife Rowe maps out in soliloquy 18:

The angels call, they call me from above,  
And bid me hasten to the realms of love;  
My soul with transport hears the happy doom,  
I come, ye gentle messengers, I come!  
Ye minstrels of the palaces above,  
Who consecrate your golden lutes to love;  
When I am entering on the dreary plain,  
Death's dismal realms, touch the melodious strain;  
The charming sound shall ev'ry care beguile,  
And make the seats of desolation smile.  
My soul prepar'd by holy ecstasy,  
Shall learn and join the chorus of the sky.  
Tho' yet a stranger to the sacred fire,  
The heights of love that your high strains inspire;  
Some kindling sparks within my bosom move,

Which shall improve in the gay worlds above.  
When these material clouds shall be dispel'd,  
And God in perfect excellence reveal'd;  
These eyes shall see thee then, and bless the sight,  
And in thy presence view immortal light;  
See beauty in its heav'nly pride unveil'd,  
And wisdom's boundless treasures unseal'd;  
See thee in sparkling majesty ador'd,  
Extol'd and own'd the universal Lord. (1–24)

The seraphic adoration, even in the literal manner with which Rowe treats it, is as well a ready-made metaphor for poetry and prophecy.

Barbauld's visionary orientation, linked with Rowe's, manifests in other ways as well. Consider Barbauld's extensive intertextual dialogue with Joseph Priestley's millenarian philosophy. The standard view is that the apocalyptic or millenarian aspect of Priestley's thinking, sharpened in response to the French Revolution, was stigmatized by the broader revival of radical millennialism in the 1790s: "the millennial dimension . . . was somewhat tarnished by the revival of radical millenarianism which relied on direct revelation. Although Priestley's millennial pulse quickened with the dramatic events of the 1790s, his religion remained balanced and urbane compared with that of the various millenarian enthusiasts like Richard Brothers and William Sharp, who emerged from the radical 'underworld' or from the enthusiastic strands of Methodism" (Fitzpatrick n.p.). More specifically, Priestly vigorously refuted Thomas Paine's attack on prophecy (*The Age of Reason* Part I), which demonstrates the intensity of Priestley's

millennialism (Priestman 34) as well as the heterodox nature of eighteenth-century British radical thought.

Barbauld's Priestley poems help us situate her apocalyptic thinking within millennial and millenarian zeitgeist of the late eighteenth century. "The Mouses's Petition" balances Priestley's philosophy of universal benevolence, a progressive theory Priestley inherited from eighteenth-century moral philosophers, especially Hartley, and carried forward in various ways—particularly in the optimistic underpinnings of necessarianism—with concerns about the end of the world. The Priestley of Barbauld's "Mouse's Petition" is an advocate of universal benevolence:

The well-taught philosophic mind  
To all compassion gives;  
Casts round the world an equal eye,  
And feels for all that lives. (25–28)

But the poem builds to an apocalyptic ending, in which hospitality, which Barbauld makes to signify universal benevolence, brings about a satisfactory, salvific experience at the end of the world:

So may thy hospitable board  
With health and peace be crowned;  
And every charm of heartfelt ease  
Beneath thy roof be found.

So when destruction lurks unseen,  
Which men, like mice, may share,



May some kind angel clear thy path,  
And break the hidden snare. (41–48)

This encoding of dense theological disquisition, shaped by intensive strands of Enlightenment moral philosophy, within a humor poem demonstrates the extent to which Barbauld engages this line of thinking, and demonstrates as well her true skill as a poet. To better understand what Barbauld does here, it is helpful to consider whether the notion of universal love or universal benevolence has an essentially apocalyptic underpinning, meaning that the achievement of such would signal the end of days. The implications of the question are that political reform, if achieved, would be a sign of the apocalypse. “The Mouse’s Petition,” then, opens up this line of inquiry, which can be pursued back into “Lines on Mrs Rowe” to suggest how Barbauld’s vatic reading of Rowe constitutes an alternative application of “universal love” as an apocalyptic signifier.

The notion of universal benevolence developed out of eighteenth-century British moral philosophy’s opposition to human selfishness and self-interestedness. Key theorists included Hume, Hartley, and Hutcheson. Benevolence was a philosophically contested term, inspiring considerable economic and political disquisition: “Hutcheson’s optimistic belief in the human capacity for universal benevolence was discredited by Hume, Adam Smith and a number of others, who advocated private affection as the primary virtue in human society” (Oishi 61–62). Yet “Because a principal concern of British moral philosophers in the eighteenth century had been to refute egoistic theories of human behavior, they had thought of universal benevolence as a concept to be opposed to self-love . . . to many thinkers throughout the eighteenth century . . . universal benevolence [stood] for the highest possibilities in human nature and the greatest hopes for human society” (Radcliffe 238–40).

Universal benevolence was an idea with legs: The “philosophical debate” about universal benevolence influenced “radical literature of the 1790s” (Oishi 62n24), especially debates in Britain about the French revolution, which reignited universal benevolence’s disquisitional impact in Britain (Radcliffe 221–22). At the same time, universal benevolence helped configure arguments for political reform, for religious dissent, and for feminism (Radcliffe 229–31). Its reinvestment in public discourse of the 1790s helps clarify how the moral philosophers of the earlier part of the eighteenth century defined the concept. Up and out of moral philosophy of the Enlightenment, universal benevolence is the opposite of “limited local attachments” (Radcliffe 230). The Burke/Price debate largely hinged on Price’s advocacy for universal benevolence versus Burke’s prioritization of the local and the immediate: “Price . . . criticized exclusive patriotism, arguing that it should be limited and governed by universal benevolence. Burke, seeking the centrality of this issue to Price and foreseeing (as well as helping to establish) its importance to the impending debate, attacked the whole notion of universal benevolence, insisting on the priority of local attachments” (Radcliffe 228–29). In other words, the larger debate about the French revolution tended to fall out along these lines, with opponents advocating Burke’s notion of limited local attachments, while supporters of the revolution subscribed to the notion of universal benevolence (Radcliffe 229).

Thus debate about the French Revolution made significant use of earlier debates among moral philosophers about universal benevolence: “All the controversialists knew that ideas were at the center of the Revolution and of whatever might take place in Britain . . . When one also remembers that many of the participants in the debate were well-versed in the moral philosophy of the century, it is unsurprising that in a number of ways the debate over universal benevolence and the Revolution recapitulates, though with important differences, earlier discussion”

(Radcliffe 229). For instance, disagreement about the definition of patriotism, which were a key part of the eighteenth-century philosophical history of benevolence that Radcliffe traces through Hume, Hutcheson, and others, marks a major point of contention between Burke (*Reflections of the Revolution in France* [1790]) and Price (*A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* [1789]), the opening salvo of British consideration of the French Revolution (Radcliffe 228). Because the French Revolution in general inspired so much apocalyptic thinking, it is helpful to identify the universal benevolence as a fundamentally apocalyptic concept, at least in the ways it was presented by Priestley and Barbauld. In fact, the British prophetic tradition as it developed after English reformation had always been much political as it was spiritual: “Anglo-American prophets during the eighteenth century inherited a tradition of apocalyptic thinking that was highly sophisticated. Surging British nationalist pride underwrote much of the millennial writing of the early modern era, which tended toward triumphalist visions of a strong Protestant state reigning serene at home and unchallenged abroad” (Juster 6).

Universal benevolence contributed to the apocalyptic thinking of the later French Revolutionary decade—the decade, it should be remembered, when Barbauld corrected and expanded her 1773 volume, linking the two eras under consideration. Opponents linked universal benevolence to the more apocalyptic aspects of the French Revolution. Radcliffe notes how “The end result, in Burke’s vision of the Revolution and its belief in universal benevolence [via Rousseau], is murder, what he calls ‘the homicide philanthropy of France’ (Regicide Peace, third letter, 153): ‘children are encouraged to cut the throats of their parents; mothers are taught that . . . they ought to make no scruple to rake with their bloody hands in the bowels of those who came from their own’ (Regicide Peace, first letter, 76)” (Radcliffe 234). In Radcliffe’s analysis, “Although almost no supporters of the Revolution treated universal benevolence as exclusive and

thus menacing, the opponents of the Revolution repeatedly portrayed it as a devastating principle, one that would virtually destroy civilization . . . Because Burke treats universal benevolence as connected to abstract theorizing, a lack of natural feelings, and a failure to value traditional institutions, it can stand for nearly everything wicked and destructive about the Revolution” (Radcliffe 233–35). Universal benevolence also threatened domestic tranquility by undermining marriage and its correlative, property rights. Radcliffe cites, among other public discourse, novels hostile to the idea of universal benevolence on moral grounds, including Charles Lloyd’s *Edmund Oliver* (1789) and Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), claiming “Almost no opponent of universal benevolence failed to mention that it would waken family affections and duties; and since domestic plots were a staple of novels, novels proved to be particularly well-suited to attacks on universal benevolence” (Radcliffe 236). In its most extreme, universal benevolence threatened human existence. Radcliffe cites David Bromwich’s comparative study of Burke and Wordsworth in *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989), 48; and Radcliffe cites several Burkeans, including Edward Sterling (Radcliffe 237–38), concluding “underlying their words is a real fear of the irrecoverable loss of what it means to be human . . . This was not a fear that the eighteenth-century moral philosophers had expressed; but it was a true for some of Burke’s followers as it was for Burke that, in David Bromwich’s summary, ‘human nature can come to an end in a moment of historical catastrophe’” (Radcliffe 238). It is this context which helps clarify the ending of “Mouse’s Petition,” with its “destruction lurk[ing] unseen” (45), figured as the fate of Priestley’s mouse.

The role of universal benevolence in “Verses on Mrs Rowe” likewise characterizes, although with a slight difference, the vatic engagement of Rowe:

Yet in no useless gloom she wore her days;  
She loved the work, and only shunned the praise:  
Her pious hand the poor, the mourner blest;  
Her image lived in every kindred breast. (27–30)

That Rowe stands in for universal benevolence is established earlier in the poem: “And her whole soul was harmony and love. / Virtue that breast without a conflict gained, / And easy, like a native monarch, reigned” (10–12). This encoding by Barbauld serves as a culminating statement on political orientation of the visionary nonconformity I have studied in this chapter.

## Epilogue: A Survey of the Term *Visionary* in Late Eighteenth-Century British Public Discourse

Application of the term *visionary* to nonconformist women poets like Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld--as well as Milton--benefits from a survey of how the term was used in eighteenth-century public discourse. The context derived from such a survey clarifies the radical nature of the visionary enterprise. By extending the survey into the nineteenth century under the assumption that usage and connotation evolve slowly, we can see how radical an enterprise visionary poetics was in the post-Milonic early modern era.

Not surprisingly, the French Revolution contributed considerably to the ideological connotations of the term *visionary* in British public discourse of the period. An exemplary passage in the early nineteenth-century biography of moderate MP John Sinclair applies the term *visionary* to those Britons who initially supported but then opposed the revolution in France:

By many estimable men the Revolution was at first contemplated with enthusiastic approbation and extravagant hope, as the dawn of a new golden era in the history of the world—the rise of “another nature and a new mankind.” While religionists, like St Martin, were expecting the predicted reign of righteousness, philanthropists were looking forward, with prospects no less visionary, to a political millennium. They could not shut their eyes to the fearful prognostics of democratic triumph. The thunder of the approaching tempest fell upon their ear; but they anticipated that the convulsion, terrible as it was, would serve to purify the political atmosphere, and be succeeded by universal clam, by events as a lesson to tyrants, written indeed in blood, but perhaps on that account the more instructive. (*Memoirs* 228–29)

This sense of the word *visionary* corresponds directly with another example from Bissett's history, where the term is used to paraphrase Burke's opposition to the French Revolution: "The notions of liberty that were cherished by the French philosophy he [Burke] accounted speculative and visionary, and in no country reducible to salutary practice" (*History* 278).. Here, the several connotative differences I have been tracing merge: *visionary* connotes an impracticable—that is, not implementable—theory, closely resembling fiction, that at the same time espouses dangerously radical views. Another example of such usage is found in John Moore's claim, advanced in *A View of the Causes and Progress of the French Revolution* (1795), that "had Mirabeau lived a few years longer than he did, his discernment would have detected, and his powerful ridicule would have exposed, the folly of those visionary politicians, who, travelling [sic] over the world on a map, like his metaphysician, regardless of mountains and rivers, declared that all power came from the people, neglecting to establish at the same time, that the people could exercise no part of that power but must delegate the whole" (1:176) Later in that same work, Moore characterizes the ineffectuality of the Girondists in similar terms: "their object from the beginning was to wean the minds of their countrymen from monarchy, even in the mildest form. They imagined that the Constitution itself contained that within it which rendered freedom insecure, and would sooner or later be the means of bringing back that despotic government which they justly abhorred as the greatest of all earthly curses, and which in the mean time retarded the establishment of that republican government, which in visionary beauty appeared to their imaginations as the greatest of all political blessings" (2:433–34). These various applications of the term *visionary* to French politics suggest that the word was highly fraught with revolutionary affiliations.

In the public discourse surrounding the French Revolution, the term *visionary* connoted a certain literary sensibility as well. In this context, another of Bissett's usages, highlighting connections between Girondists and the literati, rewards scrutiny:

The republicans now consisted of two parties, the Girondists and the Mountain. The former contained the principal part of the literary class, ingenious, and eloquent enemies of monarchy; the latter, the most daring and blood-thirsty directors of the murderous mobs, the votaries of anarchy. Though men of genius, the leaders of the Gironde were much more brilliant than solid. Formed to the metaphysical theories long so prevalent in France, they carried their visionary abstractions to practical life. To subtle paradox and ingenious hypothesis, which are commonly the effusions of literary retirement, many of them joined profligate corruption and rapacity, that would grasp all the wealth and power which stimulate injustice in the active world, with an excessive vanity, which represented all the objects of their cupidity as within the reach of their invention and enterprise. This wildness of speculative sciolism, this depravity of principle and pursuit, and this overweening self estimation dictated their internal and external politics: impelled them to seek a republic not suitable to the human character; in which levelling [sic] others, they might themselves enjoy boundless riches and unlimited sway; and to fancy that their talents and address could employ both the weakness and strength of various parties, in their own and other countries as instruments for the execution of their designs. (2:408)

Through the term *visionary*, Bissett connects radical politics with literary imagination—and he intends the term as an insult to both endeavors. Bissett implies the need for a separation of



literary enterprise from political action, meaning that the imaginative nature of the former prevents its application in the realm of the latter. Because the French Revolution so deeply engaged the imagination of many British writers and artists, spurring them on to a wide variety of political engagements, Bissett's argument provides vital context for analyzing the visionary texts of the French Revolutionary period authored by Blake (and others).

Blake's own visionary engagement, especially the early prophecies in general and *America a Prophecy* in particular, were self-conscious recuperations of the term *visionary* from the overwhelmingly negative application of that word within in public discourse. Beyond the obvious partisan applications of the term by Anglicans and conservatives like Bissett, and Moore, it is important to appreciate that the negative connotations of *visionary* were not simply a conservative invention.

*Visionary* was used negatively by liberals as well. In William Gordon's *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America* (1788), the term is employed as an outright insult, of particular interest here because Gordon was a dissenting minister whose pro-American sympathies prompted his relocation to America in the 1770s. Gordon's account of the American war, not altogether favorable to the colonists, contains this critique of the early efforts of colonial militias:

Congress have at length determined upon having a permanent army. They ought before to have gotten rid of an error, which the experience of all mankind has exploded, viz. the carrying on a war with militia, or which is nearly the same, temporary levies. America has been amused almost out of her liberties. The behaviour of the militia upon one and another occasion, has been unreasonably extolled, by men who judge only from the surface, by others who had particular

views in misrepresenting, and by visionary men whose credulity easily swallowed every vague story, in support of a favorite hypothesis. Some of the first generals in the American service, are ready solemnly to declare, that they never were witnesses to a single instance during this contest, that can countenance an opinion of militia or raw troops being fit for the real business of fighting. (494)

Visionaries, in Gordon's assessment, were gullible fools, blindly beholden to received wisdom, which they adhere to even in the face of contradictory evidence. In this respect, the pro-American Gordon and the British conservatives Lord Minto and Viscount Melville use the word in precisely the same way, albeit toward different ideological ends.

Ardent British supporters of the French Revolution, against whom the term *visionary* was often employed, also used the term to disparage anti-republican conservatives. For example, this passage from John Courtenay's *A Poetical and Philosophical Essay on the French Revolution* (1793) demonstrates the term *visionary* being used to counter the Burkean position:

And are there Whigs, who truth's bold doctrines strain,  
Of timid heart, or visionary brain?  
Who talk of Freedom as a royal boon,  
And in their zeal would prosecute a tune.  
See Britain's fabric shook by every scrawl,  
And read BELSHAZZAR'S fate on every wall.  
Who scar'd by false alarms, and EDMUND'S note,  
Denounce Paine's whims, and spread them by their vote!  
Their fears, with scorn will manly Fox deride,  
His Country's Genius, Guardian, and her pride.

—They cry, --- from Gallia's shore rebellion springs,  
And then devote her to the sword of Kings;  
With grim delight call Brunswic's ravenous band,  
(His dogs of war) to desolate the land.  
Their deeds, with joy the LORD'S ANOINTED views,  
And pleads the right—that Bryant gives the Jews. (15–16)

Although the political views espoused in the verse are dichotomous to those expressed in the passages from Bisset's history examined above, which tow the Burkean line, the use of *visionary* is the same, signifying unrealistic or improbable thinking.

There are also instances in the historical record of liberals actively refuting the term *visionary* so as to establish themselves as credible, rather than utopian, reformers. During the debates surrounding parliamentary reform that occurred in the 1790s, a few otherwise reform-minded partisans were careful to avoid accusations of visionary agitation. William Belsham, a writer with close ties to a number of key radicals, actually used the term *visionary* to differentiate proponents of moderate parliamentary reforms from more ardent republican positions:

In consequence of the spirit of discontent, even of disaffection, by which a considerable proportion of the community seemed at this period to be animated and which had given rise to various political associations of an alarming nature, and in which ideas of government reform were carried to a visionary and dangerous extreme, it was thought proper by many of the most distinguished advocates of constitutional liberty, about this period, to institute a society under the name of the "Friends of the People," for the sole purpose of effecting a reform in parliament, on the principles so often stated and so ably enforced by Mr. Pitt

and other judicious patrons of reform, presuming that all other necessary and beneficial reforms would follow in safe and regular gradation. (4:428)

Belsham's account suggests that many reformers avoided association with radical—here rendered as *visionary*—politics, even when the positions they held were in general terms viewed as being radical. This tendency is exemplified in the case of Theophilus Lindsey, who followed the dictates of his conscience out of a comfortable ministerial position in the Church of England to become a leader of British Unitarians. Lindsey's biographer Thomas Belsham (William's brother) insisted that Lindsey was

no enthusiast or visionary. He had ever lived in a station of ease and affluence, and comparatively high consideration. His company had been sought after by the opulent, the learned, and the great. Nor was he insensible to the advantages and the comforts of an eminent and respectable station. He had not been at all accustomed to struggle with difficulties, or to endure the privations and the obscurity of indigence. His delight had been to employ his affluence in doing good, and he had even made conscience of saving nothing for his own use from the revenues of his living. (37)

It can be inferred from Belsham's usage that a visionary exists beyond the pale, outside the bounds of social norms. Belsham's rhetorical position is to legitimize Unitarianism by underscoring the respectability of its practitioners—that is, to assert Unitarianism's non-visionary nature.

The Belsham-Lindsey example is particularly revealing because it speaks directly to the legitimacy of the Unitarian church in Britain. Even among dissenters, Unitarians practiced a radical brand of Christianity, which was both anti-trinitarian and Socinian, denying the divinity

of Christ. Among the more prominent Unitarians was Joseph Priestley, a co-founder, against whom the disparaging term *visionary* was frequently used. Bissett, for one, likened Priestley to the openly radical Thomas Paine, claiming “Priestley was more fitted for forming visionary and sophistical speculatists among men of superficial literature, whereas Paine was best qualified for effecting a change on the vulgar and ignorant.” (2:353) Here, Bissett once again associates visionary radicalism with feckless literary pursuits (Priestley was a prolific writer, producing works of theology, philosophy, literary criticism, and chemistry). In another key passage from Bissett’s *History*, Priestley and another dissenting radical, Richard Price, are attacked in a manner that likens visionary politics to effete literary activity:

As the death of Dr. Johnson is an epoch in the literary history of the times, it may not be unseasonable to give a short sketch of literary efforts at this period. The American war had produced a vast multiplicity of political pamphlets, of which, though the greater number were of only a temporary interest, yet some, from the ability of the writers, the importance of the principles, and the receptions of the doctrines, were of much more permanent consequence. Two men of considerable talents and high reputation engaging in this controversy, broached opinions of a very unconstitutional tendency: these were, doctors Richard Price and Joseph Priestley, gentlemen who from nature and study possessed the means of promoting, to a great extent, the benefit of society, were disposed to use their talents for those meritorious purposes, and had actually employed them with very great success, in certain paths, to the good of mankind; yet were now active in exerting them in pursuit of objects, or at least in inculcating doctrines of a very injurious tendency to the existing establishment. With genius competent to any

subject of literary or scientific investigation, and deeply skilled in calculation, Price had peculiarly distinguished himself by inquires into population, and by financial research. Priestley, by his discoveries in chemistry, electricity, pneumatics, and subjects relative to these, had made valuable additions to physical knowledge and science, both for theoretical contemplation and practical use. These two philosophers were dissenters, and dissenters of a class which has generally carried dissent beyond theological opinions, and has incorporated politics. Men, at once able and ambitious, if they happen to find themselves in a minority, very naturally seek to render that minority a majority. In situations of peace by making converts, as in situations of war by making conquests, aspiring leaders seek power. From calculations and from chemical researches, doctors Price and Priestley betook themselves to politics, and to theological controversy, which was intended to minister to politics; adopted the visionary theories which the profound wisdom of Locke had not prevented from pervading his opinions in politics, with many of the hypothetical comments which had joined them in the course of the century: these they inculcated as the just conclusions of political wisdom, and the proper rules for political conduct. (2:31)

Of course, the position Bissett is articulating, likening idle literariness to visionary sensibility, was often refuted with scorn: “There is no mistake more thoroughly to be deplored on this subject, than that of persons sitting at their ease, and surrounded with all the conveniences of life, who are apt to exclaim. [‘]We find things very well as they are.[‘] and to inveigh bitterly against all projects of reform, as the romance of visionary men, and the declamations of those who are never satisfied,” wrote Daniel Isaac Eaton, publisher of the radical *Politics for the People*, in

1793 (1:171). Yet largely on account of their associations with Unitarianism, Priestly and Price were particularly susceptible to attacks of the sort Bissett's exemplifies.

Even beyond their radical religious standing, Priestley and Price were in the 1780s vocal public supporters of American independence, a position that also earned them the disparaging label *visionary*. A few remarks on Price will suffice to show how adamantly radicals rejected the term *visionary* as a designation of their political ideology.

Price's support of American independence was the subject of a ferocious pamphlet war. One of Price's more vituperative opponents, John Shebbeare, argued that

the Doctor's visionary suggestions . . . crown the folly of his observations. He then says, "None who know him can believe him to be disposed to superstition." but, certainly, all who know him must believe him vehemently disposed to falsification and folly. Were the Doctor himself, and all the teachers, preachers, presbyterians, independents, and other sectaries, which are, and have so long been the pest of Britain, to swear that Dr. Price believes what he has said, there cannot be a jury of twelve sensible and honest men to be found in England, who would give a verdict on such evidence. I except that of his friend Priestley, as incompetent and inadmissible, from his disbelief of the soul's being immortal.

(184–85)

Price thought enough of such attacks to answer them directly. At the conclusion of *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (1785), an overt expression of support for the American revolutionaries, Price engaged in a bit of revealing self-reflection:

Often, while employed in writing these papers, have I wished for a warning voice of more power. The present moment, however auspicious to the United States if

wisely improved, is critical; and, though apparently the end of all their dangers, may prove the time of their greatest danger. I have, indeed, since finishing this Address, been mortified more than I can express by accounts which have led me to fear that I have carried my ideas of them too high, and deceived myself with visionary expectations.----And should this be true . . . [t]he consequence will be, that the fairest experiment ever tried in human affairs will miscarry; and that a REVOLUTION which had revived the hopes of good men and promised an opening to better times, will become a discouragement to all future efforts in favour of liberty, and prove only an opening to a new scene of human degeneracy and misery. (84–85)

Price's self-doubt, however rhetorical in nature, indicates the degree to which *visionary* had become synonymous with *delusional* in the public discourse of the 1780s, especially regarding America. At the same time, Price effectively recuperates the word *visionary*, using it in precisely the same way as his critics, except that Price uses the word to advocate for the very political principle so many radicals of the period, especially poets, embraced: influencing legislative and cultural reforms through imagining and communicating alternative modes of organization, administration, and identity.

Contemporaneous discussion of Price shows that, as it had for *radical*, the term *visionary* also became a rather imprecise synonym for *dissenter*. Such overgeneralization of course required painting dissenters with a rather large brush, but examples of writers conflating all dissent (any non-Anglican Protestant Christianity) into the term *visionary* do exist, demonstrating the high degree of slippage between political and religious radicalism. In one such



example, the conservative historian Huish conflates anti-monarchist ideology with support for religious liberty:

The result of the memorable contest did not tend by any means to alienate the affections of the people from their sovereign . . . his principles of toleration were well known, but his majesty certainly declared that the attempt of the dissenters was, not to say the least of it, ill-timed. Every innovation or change in the religious establishment of the country were to be regarded, at this period, with a jealous eye. The combined efforts of atheism and infidelity were tearing the crown from the brow of a neighbouring [sic] monarch—the seeds were sown in the country, and it was necessary to destroy them ere they began to germinate. Partial changes of the constitution . . . are all of them events involving more or less of evil; but they have their measure and their boundary, and sometimes their compensation. but the attempt to dethrone God from the government of the world, is an evil of which no thought of man can calculate the amount. To the verge of this evil we were brought, together with the rest of Europe, by the moral contagion of French principles, especially in the first years of the revolutionary era. The source of Britain's safety through that menacing period, was, under Heaven, the moral and religious example of the king. Whilst all around was vacillating, and Europe was sinking fast into the vortex—while a vain and visionary philosophy was divorcing man from his Maker, and writing her decrees with the blood of her votaries—Great Britain's king, armed with intrepid moderation and steady purpose, pursued his right honest course, through good and evil report. (555–56)

Another instance of linking domestic religious civil rights with revolutionary ideology occurs, not surprisingly, in Bissett's *History*, an unapologetically partisan work:

This year [1790] the French Revolution began to be better understood in Britain, and to produce even more definite and specific opinions, either of approbation or censure, or of a mixture of both. Many Britons still continued upon British principles to admire the French Revolution, and though they regretted the excesses which had accompanied its operations, yet expected that the violence would subside, and that a system of rational and beneficial liberty would be established. They saw that the plan of polity would considerably deviate from the British constitution. The greater number of literary men continued to favour the changes, and imputed the enormities to the vitiating system of government under which the French had so long lived, joined with the enthusiasm of new liberty. but the most experienced and discriminating of philosophical politicians perceived that the Gallic revolution in its nature, principles, and effects, was different from any former case, and avoided unqualified opinions concerning either its merits, or probable duration. They considered it as a composition of extraordinary phenomena, not yet sufficiently investigated to become the foundation of a just theory; but they saw that the rapidity of French change far exceeded the progressive variations of circumstances, and the human character. Writers of genius and erudition attached to certain visionary principles and doctrines, prized the French revolution more for its particular acts and innovations, than for the general assertion of liberty; and celebrated most highly those measures which overthrew hierarchy, reduced monarchy, and degraded aristocracy. Dissenters of

very high literary reputation, and unimpeached private character, were so transported by their peculiar doctrines and sentiments, as to praise the lawless violence of the Parisian mob, and the abduction of the royal family in triumph, because these acts tended to overthrow existing orders: and even recommended the example of the French to the imitation of the English. The able and eminent Dr. Price, and his many votaries in civil and religious dissent, manifested in 1790, an unqualified admiration of the French changes, and proposed a close connexion with the revolutionists of France, and the people of England. (314–15)

In Bissett's rather convoluted passage, religious liberty signifies republicanism, while at the same time enlightenment intellectualism signifies revolutionary abandon. Bissett demonstrates the extent to which nuanced ideological viewpoints, not to mention a variety of denominational and doctrinal positions, could be rather imprecisely dismissed with the single term *visionary*.

Even a glancing survey of how the term *visionary* was used in the public discourse of the late eighteenth century, such as the one I have undertaken here, reveals several key points. Radical intervention occurred frequently in debates surrounding the major issues of the day, such as Britain's American policies, limitations on religious liberty, parliamentary reform, and responses to the French Revolution. Each issue at least touched upon and at times directly affected the others. Negative usage of *visionary* occurred in public discourses (including parliamentary debate, periodical polemic, and contemporary history) orbiting these issues. So when poets like Blake employed visionary poetics in their works, as Blake self-consciously and unapologetically did, they were performing acts with deep political resonances.

From the point of view of a Burkean conservative like Bissett all literary enterprise was little more than a waste of time, an effete indulgence of speculative, fanciful sensibilities. It was,

in a word, visionary. It is helpful to have Bissett's perspective in mind when examining the nuances of the term *visionary*'s late eighteenth-century literary-critical meaning, which relates directly to how writers of the period, especially poets, defined the concept of fiction, not so much as a literary genre but rather as an epistemological category. In other words, our understanding of visionary poetics benefits from a clearer understanding of how contemporary and near-contemporary poets conceived of their own associations with and responsibilities to the truth.

No eighteenth-century critical viewpoint, excepting perhaps Samuel Johnson's, better represents the mainstream perspective, or conventional wisdom, than Thomas Warton's. An Oxford don, Spenser scholar, and highly regarded poet, Warton was the prototypical eighteenth-century establishment figure, perhaps the envy even of Doctor Johnson (Vance 98). So Warton's usage of *visionary*, which carries the full gravitas of eighteenth-century academic judgment and thus constitutes a relatively conservative perspective, provides a useful means for considering the poetics signified by the term. Moreover, innovation was not a principle concern of Warton's, and so his verse provides a standard against which to measure the more radical interventions of later poets. Of particular use is Warton's volume *Poems* (1777), about which Clarissa Rinaker's observations still ring true: "[Warton] took advantage of his reputation as a critic of Spenser and historian of English poetry to collect and publish a small volume of his best verse made up largely of new poems written during the course of more laborious work and showing the influence of his scholarly interests" (127). Given Warton's cultural position, it is not surprising that epistemological usage of *visionary* in *Poems* correspond to partisan usage of the word in the broader public discourse.

Instances of *visionary* standing in for or loosely signifying *untruthfulness* can be found throughout the public, especially parliamentary, record of the period. Such usage roughly equates

*visionary* with *fictive*, similar to the sense of the word Warton draws upon in a poem entitled “Monody. Written Near Stratford Upon Avon,” which considers the influence of nature on Shakespeare’s imagination. Warton defines imagination in terms of the critical principle of invention, or the capacity to generate fiction: thus the speaker, meditating on the banks of the titular river, is struck by the Avon’s inspirational beauty and imagines how Shakespeare “Here first, at Fancy’s fairy-circled shrine . . . in stripling years unripe, / Framed of [Avon’s] reeds a shrill and artless pipe” (7). This vision of Shakespeare’s pastoral apprenticeship gives way to a much darker one, representing the totality of Shakespearean drama:

Sudden thy beauties, Avon, all are fled,  
As at the waving of some magic wand;  
An holy trance my charmed spirit wings,  
And awful shapes of leaders and of kings  
People the busy mead,  
Like spectres swarming to the wisard’s hall;  
.....  
Pale Terrour leads the visionary band,  
And sternly shakes his sceptre, dropping blood. (7–8)

In this allegorized treatment of history and tragedy, Warton employs *visionary* as a synonym for *imagined* or *envisioned*, thereby signifying poetic invention as a literary-critical concept that loosely corresponds with the more generalized sense of *untruth* that the word connotes elsewhere in the public record. (see also Rinaker 130; Fairer 191).

Eighteenth-century religious politics contextualize another of Warton’s employments of the term *visionary*. The enlightened Anglican orthodoxy of “Ode Written at Vale-Royal Abby in

Cheshire” delimits the speculative boundaries of Warton’s imaginative fancy, which does not extend into the realm of religious liberty. The poem, a meditation inspired by a ruined monastery, pointedly criticizes England’s Catholic past and in turn valorizes the orthodox reformation of the sixteenth century that laid the groundwork for Britain’s Lockean/Newtonian enlightenment:

From these deserted domes, new glories rise;  
More useful institutes, adorning man,  
Manners enlarg’d, and new civilities,  
On fresh foundations build the social plan.

Science, on ampler plume, a bolder flight  
Essays, escaped from Superstition’s shrine:  
While freed Religion, like primeval light  
Bursting from chaos, spreads her warmth divine. (35)

The speaker concedes that monastic institutions did preserve education and poetry; the abbey was once a spot where “Proud Hospitality dispens’d her store” (33) and “Learning, guarded from a barbarous age, / Hover’d awhile” as “the solitary minstrel . . . around the social flame / Tun’d his bold harp to tale of chivalry” (34). But such preservation was achieved only through the perpetuation of a false and corrupt religion, for the abbey was also a place where

. . . the sorceress, Superstition blind,  
Amid the pomp of dreadful sacrifice,  
O’re the dim roofs, to cheat the tranced mind,  
Oft bade her visionary gleams arise (33).

This usage of *visionary* acknowledges that error, advanced through poetry, may take on the appearance of truth. In Britain's past, Catholicism and (literary) romance both lied—but their lie were powerful. Warton acknowledges, in order to reject, the subversive potential of the imagination; here, *visionary* connotes more than imagined fancy, as it does in the Shakespeare “Monody”: it is, to borrow a phrase from Warton's beloved Spenser, error “fair seeming.” Warton's purpose may have been to stem the resurgent interest in Catholicism raised by the eighteenth-century antiquarian movement—of which Warton was a significant participant (Kennedy 512). Still, the correspondence between this use of *visionary* and analogous employments of the term in anti-toleration rhetoric, such as Bissett's attacks on Priestley and Price, is striking.

Although Warton's poetic usage of *visionary* frequently corresponds to analogous examples found in the public record, which lends the term resonant political connotations, it is important to recognize that for literary theorists and practitioners like Warton, the word's specific literary-critical meaning is only supplemented by political contexts. The term is first and foremost a critical designation, dealing with notions of imagination or fancy. In *Poems*, Warton obliquely demonstrates this point through examinations of poetry's capacity to generate fiction, which he acknowledges as poetry's greatest value and its most dangerous capability. For example, the sense of doctrinal error implied by usage of the term *visionary* in “Ode Written at Vale-Royal Abby in Cheshire” is particularly hazardous when articulated through poetry, a point Warton underscores in another poem, entitled “The Suicide.” In the latter ode, Warton explores what happens when imaginative poetry, designated “specious lays” (47), is at odds with religious truth, that “golden shield” against “Life's fiercest ills” (47). Warton, echoing the venerable Platonic critique (banishing poets from the republic), underscores poetry's danger to the state-

church hegemony, namely its ability to advance heretical positions credibly, in its imaginative or *visionary* capability. This position is first and foremost a literary-critical theorization, over and above any political implications.

The precise—or at least conventional—eighteenth-century literary-critical meaning of the term stems from its ability to signify a condition or state of fictionality. In Warton's usage, that condition or state can be defined in terms of imagination or fancy. Later poets, including Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson (<—provide note citing sources), explore the possibility that ideas treated poetically may be strictly untrue without being outright lies. As a result, the condition signified by the term *visionary* breaks free of the true/untrue (truth/fiction) binary that Warton's usage makes fast, and points to a wider range of verisimilitudes. And it is this condition that the Romantics, Blake foremost among them, fully exploit.

Surveying late eighteenth-century literary-critical and political meanings of the term *visionary* through Charlotte Smith's work is particularly useful, as Smith represents a subtle *via media* between the conservative epistemology of Warton and the radical prophecies of Blake. During the revolutionary years 1789–1793, Smith's imaginative fiction was overtly if vexingly political, culminating in the novel *Desmond* (1792) (see Wang 38). As a political novelist, theorizing and practicing fiction was Smith's stock in trade; thus her use of the term *visionary* rewards scrutiny. The relationship between imagination and truth defines Smith's use of the word in several of the sonnets, usage that predates the radical engagements undertaken in the novels of the French Revolutionary period.

Instances of Smith's usage bring us closer to the *visionary* as epiphanic experience—as a term of designation for a poet's vatic or prophetic engagements with her historical moment. Like Warton, Smith invests considerable energy in explorations of the imagination; the term *visionary*



retains its link to the human imaginative faculty, especially the poet's ability to draw inspiration from both the natural world and memory. For example, Smith's "To Melancholy. Written on the Banks of the Arun, October 1785," which explores sadness's capacity for generating poetry, envisions melancholy as a ghostly presence, later identified as "Pity's own Otway" (1:32). Tellingly, this allusive figuration of melancholy, referring to the Restoration playwright Thomas Otway, is not a real haunting. The poem carefully maintains its metaphorical integrity: the ghostly presence "oft *seems*" to wail; the speaker openly confesses that "Pity's own Otway I *methinks* could meet" (1:32; emphasis added). The feeling is real enough, while its figuration signifies poetic creativity, a condition that is nevertheless capable of generating some degree of actual consolation: "O Melancholy!—such thy magic power, / That to the soul these dreams are often sweet, / And sooth the pensive visionary mind!" (1:32). This usage resembles Warton's Shakespeare "Monody," wherein observances of nature generate theatrically conceived presences in the poet's imagination. Indeed critics of Smith have tended to emphasize the theatricality of the sonnets (Pratt 564); in this particular case, the theatrical likewise constitutes a condition of epiphanic—or vatic—engagement, providing the poet with a new, or at least as yet unrealized, understanding of reality. Again, as in Warton's "Monody," the capacity to remember, to call forth images of past experiences, is a characteristic of the condition Smith signifies with the term *visionary*. For example, in sonnet 45, "On Leaving a Part of Sussex," Smith's speaker envisions how she will subsequently remember the landscape of which she is presently taking leave:

. . . Sighing I resign  
Thy solitary beauties—and no more  
Or on thy rocks, or in thy woods recline,

Or on the heath, by moonlight lingering, pore  
On air-drawn phantoms—While in Fancy's ear  
As in the evening wind thy murmurs swell,  
The Enthusiast of the Lyre who wander'd here,  
Seems yet to strike his visionary shell,  
Of power to call forth Pity's tenderest tear,  
Or wake wild frenzy—from her hideous cell! (1:45)

Here the poetic imagination generates verisimilar fictions that are at the same time small epiphanies, capable of influencing or changing perceptions, even if only slightly.

Smith's usage moves us a bit further away from the Wartonian concept of imagination or fancy, which describes the poet's capacity to generate fictions irrespective of verisimilitude, toward a category of imagination more precisely related to envisioning alternative possibilities. In the extensive treatment of the subject that Warton undertakes in *The Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747), the visionary condition is still akin to dreaminess, rather than constituting a reality in and of itself. The imaginative faculty, like dreaming, generates fiction, even if it seems real. This capability is one that Warton treats warily, because its verisimilar power is attended by moral and ethical pitfalls, or self-delusion:

False Folly's smiles, that like the dazzling [sic] spells  
Of wily Comus, cheat th'unweeting eye  
With blear illusion, and persuade to drink  
The charmed cup, that Reason's mintage fair  
Unmoulds, and stamps the monster on the man.  
Eager we taste, but in the luscious draught

Forget the pois'nous dregs that lurk beneath. (9)

For this reason, Warton prefers to aim the visionary act toward religious contemplation:

Beneath yon' ruin'd Abbey's moss-grown piles

Oft let me sit, at twilight hour of Eve,

.....

. . . thro' the gloomy void

That far extends beneath their ample arch

As on I tread, religious horror wraps

My soul in dread repose. but when the world

Is clad in Midnight's raven-colour'd robe,

In hallow charnel let me watch the flame

Of taper dim, while airy voices talk

Along the glimm'ring walls, or ghostly shape

At distance seen, invites with beck'ning hand

My lonesome steps, thro' the far-winding vaults. (5-6)

A corresponding idea dominates Smith's sonnet 77, "To the Insect of the Gossamer," wherein the brief glimpse of a spider weaving a web signifies the poet's own efforts to overcome suffering through imagination:

Thus on the golden thread that fancy weaves

Buoyant, as Hope's illusive flattery breathes,

The young and visionary Poet leaves

Life's dull realities, while sevenfold wreaths

Of rainbow-light around his head revolve.

Ah! soon at Sorrow's touch the radiant dreams dissolve! (2:18)

Like Warton, Smith continues to deal in the realm of the counterfactual; yet Smith's envisioning of a more desirable alternative reality does take a step beyond the strictly fictional realm of poetic fancy treated by Warton. In Smith's version, the *visionary* signifies, as it were, a truer kind of fiction. Smith is an important step toward the radical visionary orientation of Blake, in which the poetic vision is capable of generating new realities, which the poet desires, by reforming existing perceptions.

Usage of the term *visionary* in verse by Mary Robinson adds nuanced context to the poetic epistemology of the late eighteenth century. The literary productions of Robinson, Smith's contemporary and the famed *Perdita*, became, throughout the 1780s, increasingly politically charged; Robinson's open support of the French Revolution, voiced in a number of poems published, at first anonymously in various periodicals and then collected as *Poems. By Mrs. Robinson* (1791), place her in the vanguard of British radicalism. Robinson's usage corresponds with the conventional negativity connoted by the word: for Robinson, the term vision connotes an untruth, a position that is fairly consistent with Warton's. Yet Robinson's usage rewards careful attention, because the term *visionary* occurs within three poems that articulate radical political prophecy. In other words, Robinson repudiates the word *visionary* while practicing visionary poetry, a paradox that affords a useful means for disentangling the critical heritage of the word from its contemporaneous—and overwhelmingly negative, as this chapter demonstrates—meaning.

It is important to distinguish the critical (that is, the subsequent analytical, interpretive, explicative, and scholarly) sense of the word *visionary*, which has its origins in M. H. Abram's *Natural Supernaturalism* and received considerable elaboration in the works of Wittreich, from

the term's eighteenth-century usage—especially as the word was used by those same writers implicated in that subsequent critical history. The critical theory signified by Abrams's and Wittreich's use of the term *visionary* is applicable to Robinson's poetic projects; however, Robinson repudiates the word even as she advances the poetics that will come to be, under the aegis of twentieth-century critics, signified by it.

Robinson's radical prophesying focuses attention on the natural liberty of the human condition and poetry's capacity to resist oppression, an idea pursued in "Ode to Despair," "The Adieu to Love," and "Ainsi Va Le Monde." In "Despair," Robinson considers the question of liberty at the level of society at large; in "Adieu," she considers it at the level of the individual, particularly with respect to self-governance; and in "Ainsi Va Le Monde," she expands upon the notion of liberty as it is treated in the two preceding poems. In all three poems, poetry is represented as a prophetic agent of truth, as the means by which the human mind orders and make sense of revelation. Unchecked passions cloud human reason, and tyranny, the unnatural erosion of human freedom, clouds perceptions. Robinson represents passion and tyranny as *visionary* concepts: falsehoods used in the service of improper governance, both of the self and of society. (you should take a look at M.R.'s "to the poet coleridge,," which directly addresses and corrections coleridge's visionary poetics.)

"Adieu to Love" dramatizes Robinson's ideas of proper self-governance, the literal embodiment of personal liberty. In the poem, human passion, represented as sexual desire, exerts a negative effect upon the mind, disordering thoughts and generating a kind of mental chaos that distorts perceptions. Robinson's speaker uses poetry as a medium of truth-telling to impose order on a disordered mind and thus regain the capacity to self-govern:

LOVE, I renounce thy tyrant sway,

I mock thy fascinating art,  
MINE, be the calm unruffled day,  
That brings no torment to the heart;  
The tranquil mind, the noiseless scene,  
Where FANCY, with enchanting mien,  
Shall in her right-hand lead along  
The graceful patroness of Song;  
Where HARMONY shall softly fling  
Her light tones o’re the dulcet string;  
And with her magic LYRE compose  
Each pang that throbs, each pulse that glows;  
Till her resistless strains dispense,  
The balm of blest INDIFFERENCE. (113)

Poetry produced under the influence of reason reorders mental processes and produces a dispassionate state of mind, refocusing perceptions of objective truth. The speaker’s assertion of control, here expressed as renunciation, dramatizes the use of poetry as an instrument of self-governance. This freedom to self-govern, which comprises Robinson’s basic definition of liberty, is a natural condition, a point Robinson underscores by renaming sexual desire “Inhuman Boy” (116). Robinson then plays with conventional angelological iconography to distinguish cherubic passion from seraphic reason:

Didst thou not feed my madd’ning sense  
With Love’s delicious eloquence,  
While on my ear thy accents pour’d

The voice of him my soul ador'd,  
His rapt'rous tones—his strains divine,  
And all those vows that once were mine.  
But mild Reflection's piercing ray,  
Soon chas'd the fatal dream away,  
And with it all my redning woes,  
While in its place majestic rose  
The Angel TRUTH!—her steadfast mien  
Bespoke the conscious breast serene;  
Her eye more radiant than the day  
Beam'd with persuasion's temper'd ray;  
Sweet was her voice, and while she sung  
Myriads of Seraphs hover'd round,  
Eager to iterate the sound,  
That on her heav'n-taught accents hung.  
Wonder'ring I gaz'd! my throbbing breast,  
Celestial energies confest;  
Transports, before unfelt, unknown,  
Throng'd round my bosom's tremb'ling throne,  
While ev'ry nerve with rapture strange,  
Seem'd to partake the blissful change. (116–17)

This phenomenon, depicted as a prophetic encounter with truth, is contrasted against passion's distortions of perception:

No more thy baneful spells shall bind  
The purer passions of my mind;  
No more, false Love, shall jealous fears  
Inflame my cheek with scalding tears;  
Or shake my vanquish'd sense, or rend  
My aching heart with poignant throes,  
Or with tumultuous fevers blend,  
Self-wounding, visionary woes. (117)

Here, *visionary* corresponds to *error*, resulting from passion's disruptive and disordering effect upon the mind. Poetry, contemplated in solitude, re-orders and reestablishes truth, a process Robinson represents as prophetic, bringing the consciousness into contact with truth through a process similar to divine revelation. In this way, self-governance, oppressed by the "tyrant sway" of love, is restored.

A similar idea is treated in the "Ode to Despair." Passion affects the individual mind in a manner analogous to the way despair effects society as a whole.

TERRIFIC FIEND! thou Monster fell,  
Condemn'd in haunts profane to dwell,  
Why quit thy solitary Home,  
O'er wide Creation's paths to roam?  
Pale Tyrant of the timid Heart,  
Whose visionary spells can bind  
The strongest passions of the mind,  
Freezing Life's current with thy baneful Art. (24)



As in “Adieu to Love,” the word *visionary* here signifies something that seems (or feels) real, but objective and rational consideration exposes its falsehood. What love does to the individual, despair does to the society or the culture at large: under the influence of despair, improper governance occurs. The long reign of despair, traced back to Cain (25), is undone by “the meek Cherub HOPE” (25)—another angelic image—whose authority, derived from liberty, is signified by the opening of the Bastille:

Thy Reign is past, when erst the brave  
Imbib'd contagion o're the midnight lamp,  
Close pent in loathsome cells, where poisons damp  
Hung round the confines of a Living Grave;  
Where no glimm'ring ray illum'd  
The flinty walls, where pond'rous chains  
Bound the wan Victim to the humid earth,  
Where VALOUR, GENIUS, TASTE, and WORTH,  
In pestilential caves entom'b,  
Sought thy cold arms, and smiling mock'd their pains.

THERE,—each procrastinated hour  
The woe-worn suff'rer gasping lay,  
While by his side in proud array  
Stalk'd the HUGE FIEND, DESPOTIC POW'R.  
There REASON clos'd her radiant eye,  
And fainting HOPE retir'd to die,

TRUTH shrunk appall'd,  
In spells of icy Apathy enthrall'd;  
And roused from Superstition's night,  
Exulting Nature claim'd her right,  
and call'd dire Vengeance from her dark domain. (25–26)

The idea that freedom and liberty constitute the natural state of human beings, humankind's true state, is threaded through both poems, albeit at different levels ("Despair" at the level of society, "Adieu" at the level of the individual). Robinson consistently associates poetry with truth, which "Despair" reaffirms:

SUCH are thy haunts, malignant Pow'r,  
There all thy murd'rous Poisons pour;  
But come not near my clam retreat,  
Where PEACE and holy FRIENDSHIP meet;  
Where SCIENCE sheds a gentle ray,  
And guiltless Mirth beguiles the day,  
Where Bliss congenial to the MUSE  
Shall round my Heart her sweets diffuse,  
Where, from each restless Passion free,  
I give my noiseless hours, BLESS'D POETRY, TO THEE. (28)

This notion of poetry as truth-telling accords with the critical analyses produced by subsequent scholars of visionary poetics, like Wittreich. Conversely Robinson repudiates the label *visionary* while simultaneously heralding the vatic potential of poetic expression. (again, see her poem to stc)

Faith in poetry as a prophetic medium, and conversely as an antidote to visionary tyranny, receives substantial treatment in “Ainsi Va Le Monde,” Robinson’s sympathetic response to Robert Merry’s pro-French Revolutionary “The Laurel of Liberty.” As in “Adieu to Love” or “Ode to Despair,” poetry is again depicted as a liberating force: Merry is “justly gifted with the Sacred Lyre, / Whose sounds can more than mortal thoughts inspire” (199). Robinson appeals to history in order to contrast Merry with his contemporaries, poets who have tended to misuse poetry by aligning it with passion and disorder:

Too long the Muse, in ancient garb array’d,  
Has pin’d neglected in oblivion’s shade;  
Driv’n from the sun-shine of poetic fame,  
Stripp’d of each charm she scarcely boasts a name:  
Her voice no more can please the vapid throng,  
No more loud Pæans consecrate her song,  
Cold, faint, and sullen, to the grove she flies,  
A faded garland veils her radiant eyes:  
A with’ring laurel on her breast she wears,  
Fann’d by her sighs, and spangled with her tears;  
From her each fond associate early fled,  
She mourn’d a MILTON lost, a SHAKSPERE dead:  
Her eye beheld a CHATTERTON oppress’d,  
A famish’d OTWAY—ravish’d from her breast;  
Now in their place a flutt’ring form appears,  
Mocks her fall’n pow’r, and triumphs in her tears:

A flippant, senseless, æery thing, whose eye  
Glares wanton mirth, and fulsome ribaldry.  
While motley mumm'ry holds her tinsel reign,  
SHAKSPERE might write, and GARRICK act in vain:  
True WIT recedes, when blushing REASON views  
This spurious offspring of the banish'd Muse. (199–200)

Through Merry, Robinson celebrates poetry's renovating power, derived from its capacity to espouse truth:

Oft when the mind, with sick'ning pangs oppress'd,  
Flies to the Muse, and courts the balm of rest,  
When Reason, sated with life's weary woes,  
Turns to itself—and finds a blest repose,  
A gen'rous pride that scorns each petty art,  
That feels no envy rankling in the heart,  
No mean deceit that wings its shaft at Fame,  
Or gives to pamper'd Vice a pompous Name;  
Then, calm reflection shuns the sordid crowd,  
The senseless chaos of the little proud,  
Then, indignation stealing through the breast,  
Spurns the pert tribe in flimsy greatness drest;  
Who, to their native nothingness consign'd,  
Sinks in contempt—nor leave a trace behind. (201)

As an instrument of truth-telling, poetry has social utility, rendering the poet into a public servant. This service transcends any fleeting celebrity attained by lesser poets who merely versify disordered passions. The poet-prophets of the past—who do “leave a trace behind”—serve a renovating purpose. Fancy, or the poetic imagination properly oriented, cuts through the “visionary gloom” of the vapid present. Like Smith, Robinson depicts the influence of poetic forbears as a kind of haunting; unlike Smith, the haunting is more akin to spiritual immortality or angelic presence than to terrifying, ghostly inhabitance:

Then Fancy paints, in visionary gloom,  
The sainted shadows of the laurel'd tomb,  
The Star of Virtue glist'ning on each breast,  
Divine insignia of the spirit blest!  
Then MILTON smiles serene, a beauteous shade,  
In worth august—in lust'rous fires array'd.  
Immortal SHAKSPERE gleams across the sight,  
Rob'd in ethereal vest of radiant light.  
Wing'd Ages picture to the dazzled view  
Each mark'd perfection—of the sacred few,  
POPE, DRYDEN, SPENSER, all that Fame shall raise,  
From CHAUCER's gloom—till MERRY's lucid days:  
Then emulation kindled fancy's fire,  
The glorious throng poetic flights inspire;  
Each sensate bosom feels the god-like flame,  
The cherish'd harbinger of future fame. (201–02)

Merry—and by implication Robinson—shares with these past masters an the understanding of poet’s vital link to truth, which liberates the individual consciousness from error:

Ah! gentle Muse, from trivial follies turn,  
Where Patriot souls with god-like passions burn;  
Again to MERRY dedicate the line,  
So shall the envied boast of taste be thine;  
So shall they sing to glorious themes aspire,  
“Warn’d with a spark” of his transcendent fire. (203)

And that higher truth, in Merry’s as well as in Robinson’s work, is liberty: “Thro’ all the scene of Nature’s varying plan, Celestial Freedom warms the breast of man” (203), which “Strangles each tyrant Phantom in its birth, / And knows no title—but SUPERIOR WORTH” (204). Throughout “Ainsi Va Le Monde,” Robinson distinguishes vatic or prophetic poetry, with its access to and transmission of truth, from visionary or fictive untruthfulness, the supreme manifestation of tyranny.

Epistemologically, Robinson understood poetry to be a medium for truth-telling, an action capable of liberating the human spirit from tyranny. This capacity presupposes that freedom is humankind’s natural condition, lost through the tyrannies that have accrued over the course of human history (her view on the social nature of freedom is found in her poem to stc). Agitation for liberty, then, was a restorative or reformative act. In this way, Robinson’s poetics were precisely analogous to the theological positions taken by radical dissenters, especially the Unitarians, whose mission was to undo centuries of theological error in the hopes of reforming the church by restoring its primitive, libertarian qualities. It follows that Robinson’s usage of the word *visionary*, which she distinguishes from prophetic truth-telling, accords with usage of the

term in contemporaneous theological discourse, including debates over the period's religious politics.

In the theological texts of the period, the strands of meaning I have been separately following come together. Use of the term *visionary* in late eighteenth-century religious and theological discourse corresponds with contemporaneous political and poetic usage. In religious contexts, *visionary* was distinguished from prophecy—often using quite precise theological arguments. Prophecy was believed to have divine origins, while visionary utterances, usually associated with a sense of charlatanism and heresy, lacked divine authority or held the taint of theological error. Understood in the broadest sense, the distinction between vision and prophecy accords with the poetics of truth-telling and of falsehood signified by Warton's, Smith's, and Robinson's various uses of the term.

In late eighteenth-century religious discourse, perceived doctrinal errors were signified using the term *visionary*. Joseph Sutcliffe, a Methodist eschatologist (Newport 100), reaffirmed the divinity of Jesus Christ by asserting the truth of Christ's passion: "for in the resurrection and ascension of our blessed Lord, we have more than visionary schemes of happiness. All his [sic] substance and reality" (5). Here *visionary* is the precise antonym of the real, and its modification of the word *schemes* generates additional negative connotations, implying the use of falsehood for illicit gain. Similarly, in debates regarding the exact nature of prophecy, misinterpretation or erroneous exegesis was often characterized using the term *visionary* (see Wrangham 213). The dissenting minister Joseph Towers, an associate of Andrew Kippis, excused the more fantastical nature of 2 Edras: "Visionary and wild as many parts of the Second Book of Edras certainly are, it nevertheless ascertains the antiquity of [true prophecy]" (217n63). Late eighteenth-century

theological or doctrinal use of the term *visionary*, particularly in discussions about Christian prophecy, precisely accords with usage in other discourses.

Within late eighteenth-century eschatological discourse, use of the term *visionary* to identify misreading of prophecy could become rather confusing. Some divines even distinguished the negative modifier *visionary* from the term *vision*, a synonym for prophecy, as in this semantically complex example from George Stanley Faber's *A General and Connected View of The Prophecies* (1808 edition): "Consequently, as *wild and ravenous beasts* were typical of *the Gentiles*, so *tame and domestic animals* were considered as proper symbols of *the Church of God*, at that time confined to *the Jews*. Nor is this the mere fancy of a visionary commentator: we have the express warrant of inspired authority for adopting such an opinion. When God was about to send St. Peter to the devout Roman centurion Cornelius, foreseeing his scruples, he condescended to remove them by a vision, manifestly explanatory of this very prophecy of Isaiah" (68–69). Likewise Sutcliffe, demonstrating the authority of the apostles, uses *visionary* to indicate something fleetingly novel, juxtaposed against the notion of everlasting truth he associated with the term *prophecy*: "They promised remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost to all who believed in Christ; and surely if the great multitudes that did believe, had not experienced those heavenly comforts, they would have let christianity sink into oblivion as the visionary wonder of the age" (12). Nearly a decade earlier, Henry Kett used similar terms while accusing Gibbon of challenging apostolic authority:

Thus has an attempt been made to shew that *The Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* is a consummate adept in the arts of misrepresentation, and that deserting the open path of truth, he has attempted to lead his readers into the



intricate labyrinths of error. If the preceding development be accurate, he has sullied the purity of christian antiquity by

I. Assigning a visionary, and inefficient cause for the propagation of the gospel.

II. Attempting to invalidate the evidence of prophecy (188)

And from the Anglican perspective, the term *visionary* also signified radicalism, or religious extremism. In a key passage from the Bampton Lectures of 1800, delivered by the Anglican divine and poet George Richards and published as *The Divine Origin of Prophecy Illustrated and Defended*, the term signifies fanatical enthusiasm, which Richards differentiates from the prudent—and thus enduring—zeal of the Old Testament prophets:

The length of time, through which they flourished, is an additional proof of just and properly directed zeal. The visionary is soon consumed in his own fire. The flame is too intense for long continuance. The phrenzy either exhausts his strength, or gives birth to extravagancies, which disgrace and ruin his cause. Thus the spirit of licentious enthusiasm, which prevailed in Germany at the period of the reformation, arose and died away within the compass of a few years. But the Prophets of Jehovah continued their predictions, with few interruptions, through many successive generations. The prophetic mantle was delivered down in a kind of hereditary descent. The light of inspiration, like the great luminary of day, shone forth from age to age, without exhausting its power, or doing injury by its heat. (276–77)

Richards uses the term *visionary* in a disparaging manner to articulate his endorsement of the Old Testament prophets' political authority: "Even the exalted situation of some of the Prophets

may justly secure them from the charge of fanaticism. The high offices, with which they were sometimes invested, ought to place them far above the suspicion of a visionary spirit of wildness” (278). Usage of the term *visionary* by late eighteenth-century divines, even when examining the nature of or debating the meaning signified by prophecy, corresponds with political and poetic usage of the period.

Discourse on biblical prophecy also reflects the variety of meanings signified by the term *visionary*. Richards’s usage denotes fanatical enthusiasm, the opposite of true prophecy, yet for other (roughly contemporaneous) exegetes, especially students of the Apocalypse of St. John, the term *visionary* could at the same time signify the perspective gained from receiving true prophecy and the poetics through which that perspective was articulated. For Robert Lowth, *visionary* was roughly synonymous to *allegorical*, indicating the process by which ideas were rendered as objects: “The whole book of Daniel being no more than a plain relation of facts partly past and partly future, must be excluded from the class of poetical prophecy. Much I confess of the parabolic imagery is introduced in that book, but the author introduces it as a prophet only; as visionary and allegorical symbols of objects and events, totally untinged with the true poetical colouring” (2:61). For Samuel Langdon, the American Congregationalist divine and Harvard president, the term *visionary* was a literary-critical term, defining the poetics of the Apocalypse of St. John:

From the nature of prophecy, and the visionary manner in which this revelation was communicated, the style must necessarily abound in the boldest figures of language, proper to paint all the surprising images in the most vivid colors; and be adapted to the various incidents by which they are introduced and connected: The metaphors must rise to the height of imagination; and the diction must often be

enigmatical. Yet the language so remarkably corresponds with that of the ancient prophets, and the images are so generally taken from them, that by recurring to similar figures used in the Old Testament, we may be led to the meaning of the metaphors and images in this book. (31)

In these examples, the complex, multivalent term *visionary* signifies prophetic insight rendered as poetry, a genre for which the Apocalypse of St. John stands as the principle model.

I have conducted this survey of usage in a variety of public discourses throughout the late eighteenth century in order to contextualize more fully the political, artistic, and theological connotations evoked by the conscious adaptation and adaptation of the visionary mode, which Barker, Rowe, Leapor, and Barbauld discretely and yet systematically advanced. I have here shown how the term *visionary* is more than a subsequent critical label for a widely popular poetic enterprise and mode; rather, the term *visionary* signified contemporaneously in a wide array of radical ways.

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